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LETTERS ON STRATEGY

VOL. II

Prince Kraft zu Hohenlohe-Ingelfingen

The
Wolseley
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LETTERS ON STRATEGY

VOL. II.

The Wolseley Series.

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LETTERS ON STRATEGY

BY
GENERAL
PRINCE KRAFT ZU HOHENLOHE-INGELFINGEN

VOLUME II.
OF
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EDITED BY
CAPT. WALTER H. JAMES

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LETTERS ON STRATEGY.

Part IV.

TWENTY-FIRST LETTER.

THE CAMPAIGN FROM THE 23RD AUGUST TO THE
1ST SEPTEMBER, 1870.

(See Plan No. IV.)

THE STRATEGICAL DEPLOYMENTS AND PLANS OF OPERATIONS.

I WILL gladly comply with your request to write more about strategy and its technical branch, although I must confess to being surprised at your objections to my manner of dealing with the science which you say is open to attack from the point of deep and earnest study.

Frederick the Great threw off to some extent the bonds which the "scientific" rules of pedants had placed on strategy; and another hard and fast system was ruthlessly destroyed by Napoleon's genius and drastic simplicity, which gave ear to sound reason alone. Only he can become master of an art who practises it under the guidance and example of other masters, and it is from the events which have been handed down to us by history, that I seek this guidance and example.

If this does not satisfy you, and you insist on preserving the "scientific" basis at any cost, you had better sort out, classify and group all the lessons which I deduce from facts, and divide them into chapters and paragraphs and head them I., I, A, a; from Alpha to Omega; which is the way I was taught the theory of

tactics 40 years ago. You will then be able to bore your readers, as much as my teachers bored me. You must however not forget to add to every definite rule you formulate, to every chapter, paragraph and section (or whatever you may call your divisions and subdivisions) that in practice exceptions may always, and will always take place; and that abstract rules never apply in their entirety to any concrete case. I must most emphatically deny your assertion that my method of study is not serious; I am most earnest in my investigation of the physical and intellectual forces which decide those bloody events which constitute war, and I do my utmost to persuade my comrades also to take up this study, by making it interesting to them, which can be done without excluding that profound earnestness which you so desire.

I know that formerly the study of any subject was not considered as being serious, unless the student was unable to keep awake at his work, but fortunately that idea is now a thing of the past. Clausewitz, my ever-memorable teacher in the dry branch of study known as the "Duties of the General Staff," broke with this idea—and having supposed interesting tactical and strategical situations, he set his pupils a series of problems, and then discussed with them the answers submitted. Verdy has perfected this method of rendering tactics and strategy interesting, by his applied form of instruction, and the outcome of this system is the "Staff Tours," adopted long since in our service.

All these methods of study are highly interesting; they are not divided into schemes or chapters, and although profoundly serious, are not in the least tedious. They contain many repetitions, and you must not blame me if I too repeat myself occasionally, for Bronsart says: "In order to justify any idea based on the history of war, it is necessary to quote a considerable number of instances similar to one another."

I shall therefore adhere to my way of treating strategy:

if you don't like it, don't read my letters, but burn them.

I shall base the discussion of the mechanical branch of strategy chiefly on Part II. of Bronsart's work, "The Duties of the General Staff in War," while in discussing the general theory I have more frequently had occasion to refer to Blume's book. In conclusion I shall be able to ascertain by reference to Bronsart whether I have touched upon all the points which are to be made the subject of our investigation.

For this purpose I will select a campaign and discuss it ; the ten days' campaign (from the 23rd August to the 1st September, 1870) seems to me to be the most suitable, as it forms a complete whole. For a strategical deployment on both sides preceded the campaign, as if the war had only just commenced.

It is also one of the most interesting campaigns ever fought, especially as regards the higher parts of strategy, and I therefore feel myself compelled also to consider it and to deduce lessons therefrom which are confirmed by Blume's theory.

I have before now stated that it is impossible to give an absolutely correct judgment after the event, particularly as regards the defeated troops and their leaders, because it is no longer possible to judge to what extent they were demoralized ; we should therefore be all the more careful in our criticism of the French measures, as a considerable portion of their army was at this time shaken by previous disasters.

The numerical strength of the German armies are given accurately in the Official Account, Vol. ii., Appendix 31. That of the French army of Châlons can only be calculated approximately.

The German forces consisted of the Third Army and the Meuse Army. The Third Army was composed of the

V., VI., and XI. Prussian, the I. and II. Bavarian Army Corps, the Wurttemberg Field Division, and the 2nd and 4th Cavalry Divisions; total: 118,095 infantry, 19,567 cavalry and 525 guns.

The Meuse Army was composed of the Guard, IV. and XII. Army Corps, and the 5th and 6th Cavalry Divisions, strength:—70,028 infantry, 16,247 cavalry and 288 guns. The grand total of 188,123 infantry, 35,814 cavalry, and 813 guns were on the 22nd August on the line of the Meuse and the Ornain between Etain and Pondrecourt, in readiness to commence operations on the 23rd from a front which extended more than 52 miles. These forces could only count on being supported by the troops investing Metz, whilst they remained in the vicinity of that town; as soon as they advanced into the interior of France they would have to depend on themselves, and be prepared for considerable loss of strength by detachments. At the very outset one infantry brigade, one cavalry regiment and two batteries had to be left behind to invest Toul and hold Nancy.

Considering the forces available, the question occurs as to whether it was not too hazardous to advance with them into the interior of France. The exact strength of the troops which the enemy would be able to place in the field could not exactly be determined; it was only known that an army of about four corps was being formed at Châlons, and as a French army corps had hitherto consisted of over 50,000 men, it might be expected that at Châlons an enemy would be encountered approximately our equal in number of combatants, who might be further strengthened by reinforcements of new formations drawn from the interior of France, at times and in numbers which could not be guessed.

You will probably agree with me as to the necessity of investigating whether such a large body of troops as the united First and Second Armies, was necessary for the investment of Metz, and whether more troops could

not have been spared for the operations against the interior of France.

The number of combatants of the troops investing Metz is not given in the Official Account of the 19th August, but you may calculate it from the Appendix by deducting from the combatant strength of the several Army Corps on the 18th August, the losses of that day (and in the case of the First Army, those of the 14th August).

That gives to the Second Army (consisting of the II., III., IX. and X. Army Corps) a strength of 75,785 infantry, 5,311 cavalry and 342 guns; and to the First Army (consisting of the I., VII. and VIII. Corps and 1st and 3rd Cavalry Divisions) a strength of 60,676 infantry, 7,924 cavalry and 264 guns, to which must be added Kummer's Reserve Division which had just arrived, strength 18½ battalions, 8 squadrons and 36 guns, and which we will credit with 18,000 infantry, 1200 cavalry and 36 guns. The total strength of the investing troops amounted, therefore, to 154,461 infantry, 14,435 cavalry and 642 guns. The German Supreme Command estimated the forces at Bazaine's disposal within the walls of Metz at about 200,000 men.

When Metz capitulated, the captured army consisted of 173,000 men, and 622 field guns. If we add to this number the losses which the Army invested in Metz suffered in the battle of Noisseville, and in the numerous skirmishes, and also the considerable loss through privations and epidemics, we shall find that the German estimate was correct. Officers, gunners, and train soldiers are not included in the number of combatants of the German investing army; we may therefore assume that the numerical strength of the investing troops was about equal to that of the troops invested, until reinforcements from the base considerably augmented the numbers of the former, from about the 1st September.

I think you will concede that the investing army was

not too large, and that it could not permanently detach more than the troops of the Meuse Army for operations in the interior of France, if the investment was to be maintained. The battle of Noisseville shows very clearly what efforts had to be made to repulse this greatest of all the sorties.

A party of officers once carried out a sortie of Bazaine from Metz in a large-scale war game; all calculations and suppositions were made as carefully as possible, from the existing historical sources. In the war game Bazaine decided to break through to the south on the right bank of the Moselle, and he carried out his sortie on the 25th August. All those who took part in the game were convinced that the success of the attempt was well within the range of possibility. As the game occupied a large number of officers during a whole winter, it would take too long to give you all the details, besides, I am aware that the results of the war game differ greatly from the reality. I quote the result merely as a proof that the most thorough criticism after the event has failed to demonstrate that the army investing Metz was unnecessarily strong.

Perhaps the only debatable point is whether the army required so much as 15,000 cavalry, and it might be suggested that the 1st and 3rd Cavalry Divisions might have been better employed with an army operating in the interior of France, than before Metz, where until the capitulation, we learn nothing of the employment of, or the necessity for such a force as this. Generally the investment of a fortress implies almost exclusively battles fought in entrenched positions, in which cavalry can play no part. But it must be borne in mind that a successful sortie was neither then nor now considered impossible, and in that case the enemy would have had to be pursued, separated from their ammunition and provision columns, hunted down and brought to bay preparatory to destroying them in a pitched battle, a proceeding which could

only be carried out by cavalry—and I do not think that two divisions would have been too many for such a purpose.

It is impossible to mention the calculation of the strength of the German Armies on the 19th August, without inviting your attention to a point which has attracted mine:—The battle of the 18th August, 1870, had lasted until long after dark—I know that the last shot from the batteries under my command was fired after 9 p.m.—the capture of St. Privat, which decided the battle, took place at 8 p.m., and the distance thence to the Supreme Command was over five miles; the report of the victory could therefore not have reached the latter until complete darkness had set in, on account of the circuitous roads which had to be traversed. Nor could the Supreme Command gain complete insight into the results of the victory until the reports had begun to arrive at daybreak on the 19th, for the left wing of the French army only quitted their position at Point du Jour in the course of the night. When, therefore, the Official Account states that a clear insight into the situation was not obtained until the day following the battle, we can only feel surprise that this was possible so early. At any rate the Supreme Command of the German army could not at such an early hour calculate with absolute correctness the available forces, for the losses sustained on the 18th could not possibly have been reported at that hour. For instance, the losses of the Guard Corps were so serious that the greater part of the infantry field officers and adjutants were *hors de combat*. Some battalions were commanded by ensigns. The IX. Corps was in a similar condition. Battalions were commanded by men who probably did not know how to make out a report. Under such circumstances a whole day is often spent in reorganizing the units and appointing officers to the vacant commands, so it would not have been possible for the Supreme Command to compute the losses of the 18th

and the number of effectives in each corps, before the 20th August.

Under these circumstances it is surprising that the Supreme Command should have been able to distribute the available forces so correctly for the two principal objects of operation, and that as early as 11 a.m. on the 19th August, not only the requisite and most important strategical decisions had been taken for the further measures, but that the necessary orders to that effect should have also been prepared and issued.

I will now ask you to follow me in calculating the strength of the French forces, which opposed the two German armies in the campaign from the 22nd August to the 1st September.

The Official Account (Vol. ii., Appendix 32) gives the strength of MacMahon's army as 167 battalions, 113 squadrons and 486 guns (including mitrailleuses). The nominal strength of a French battalion was 800 men, of a squadron 150 horses exclusive of officers. If this strength was attained, the army of Châlons consisted of 133,600 infantry, 16,450 cavalry and 486 guns.

According to the official reports (Official Account) 83,000 men capitulated after the battle of Sedan.

	MEN.
Prisoners made during the battle	21,000
Wounded	14,000
Killed	3,000
Disarmed in Belgium	3,000
Capitulated	83,000
Total	<u>124,000</u>

And if we add to this number the troops which succeeded in reaching Mézières through the forest paths of the Ardennes, and which (according to French statements) amounted to 11,000 men, and the losses in the battle of Beaumont and in the engagement of Nouart, as

well as those incurred during the marches between the dates of the 22nd August and the 1st September, and lastly the numbers of lately-joined recruits, who, according to information received from the French, deserted on the line of march to return to their homes, it would appear that the actual strength was about equal to the nominal war strength.

In addition to the Army of Châlons just referred to, MacMahon could count on being reinforced by Vinoy's Corps which was being formed in Paris and which was to reach him by rail. On the 30th August, two divisions reached Mézières and Rheims respectively. These corps consisted of three divisions, total strength:—37½ battalions, 8 squadrons and 90 guns (including mitrailleuses). We may estimate them at 30,000 infantry, 1200 cavalry and 90 guns.

If we add Vinoy's Corps to MacMahon's forces, we find that their troops were outnumbered by the German Third and Meuse Armies, at the most by 25 or 30,000 men, for the superiority of the Germans consisted chiefly in artillery and cavalry, the former possessing 200 guns more than the French, and the latter being twice as strong. The mere numerical superiority cannot be called crushing when over 200,000 men are employed on either side. Compared with the German troops, those of MacMahon were of a somewhat lower value, for part of them had been defeated early in August, part of them contained a considerable admixture of new formations about whose condition various complaints from the ranks of the French army have been made public. The German armies on the other hand were accustomed to and confident of victory, and this feeling, in addition to the battle experience gained, gave them a most formidable superiority. The French army on the other hand was much nearer to its bases of supplies than the Germans were to theirs, a fact which becomes important as soon as the question of replacing ammunition and losses arises.

You will at any rate perceive from these figures how quickly numerical superiority dwindles away, even in a victorious war, when the victor penetrates into the enemy's country. Thus in the case before us the considerable numerical superiority of the Germans at the commencement of the war, was within three weeks reduced almost to an equality with the French on account of the necessity of besieging Strassburg, investing Metz, and holding the long line of operations.

It is hard to say whether the French Government could have given Marshal MacMahon more troops at this time. We know that a considerable number of battalions of Parisian Mobiles were sent back to Paris under Trochu's command; whether it was wise to do so we are unable to judge, but we do know that fears were entertained lest these undisciplined troops should prove a source of weakness, rather than of strength to the army. Nor are we able to say whether other forces were at the disposal of the Imperial Government. I am rather inclined to believe, and you will probably agree with me, that the French Government was fully aware of the danger of the moment, and assembled every available man who could at this time be placed in the field. Necessity compelled compliance with the old strategical rule, that all available forces should be united for the purpose of attaining the principal object, and that they should not be dispersed for any secondary considerations.

Having now considered the opposing forces available on either side for the campaign, from the 22nd August to the 1st September, let us turn to the strategical deployments, and the plans of operations. It is a peculiar feature that in this campaign, which was simply the continuation of the preceding operations, the strategical deployment on the part of the Germans should have

been more definitely separated, from the beginning of the operations, by a day of rest, than was the case at the beginning of the war. The recontre-engagements, or chance battles, or whatever you may choose to call the collisions of the 2nd, 4th and 6th August, interfered with a calm strategical deployment, and left us in doubt as to which day should be considered as completing the deployment, and which as commencing the operations. The two Armies (the Third and the Meuse) were assembled in a position on the Ornain and the Meuse for the new campaign, and were granted a day of rest on the 22nd August, just as Napoleon I. in October, 1806, gave his assembled army two rest days. On the 23rd August the movements began and continued in uninterrupted sequence. Owing to the great distance from the enemy the luxury of a rest day was granted by the Supreme Command of the German Army, for it was considered quite impossible for the French assembled at Châlons to disturb the German Armies as early as the 22nd or 23rd August.

You will justly blame me for speaking of the "luxury" of a rest day, and ask if it was not rather an absolute necessity, and I admit that the term is not exactly correct. I used it more as a figure of speech, for so far as I can judge by the Corps to which I then belonged, a day of rest was indispensable. Since the 3rd August the Corps had executed fatiguing marches daily, with the exception of the 9th August, which was their only halting day. On the 17th a forced march had been made under a burning sun. On the 18th the Corps started at 4 a.m., and after marching over 14 miles, fought a decisive battle until far into the night, and though it made no appreciable progress on the 19th, still it was not allowed to rest, for the care of the many wounded, the burial of the dead, the clearing of the battlefield, throwing out an advance guard and reorganizing the units, kept everybody employed, and added to all this the baggage, without which

no day of rest can be utilized, had not arrived. It had been separated from the troops early on the 17th, but owing to the congestion of the lines of communication, it was not able to reach the troops until the evening of the 19th. Rations were consequently very scanty on the 17th, none were given out on the 18th, and it was only on the following evening that the regular issue could be resumed. At noon on the 19th August the Corps received orders to march immediately towards the Meuse, as part of the Meuse Army; but this order could not be carried out, as the XII. Corps was using the roads and marching between the bivouacks of the Guard Corps. The latter was therefore unable to march before the morning of the 20th, and its headquarters reached Woël, their destination in the deployment on the 21st August. The soldiers were tired out, and dragged themselves painfully along the roads on these two days, so that it was obvious no fresh campaign could be begun while they were in that condition. Even their boots, and the horses' hoofs called unmistakably for at least one day's halt for repairs.

Rest was no less a necessity to the XII. Corps, as it had begun its march on the 19th, the day after the battle, and continued through the night. The IV. Corps having made a few minor movements on the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th August, reached Commercy, where it rested on the 21st.

The Third Army reached the country between the Ornain and the Meuse by marches which had latterly not been very fatiguing, and rested on the 21st and 22nd August. The entire Third Army as well as the IV. Corps were certainly in fit condition to commence operations on the 21st, but they were stopped "until the troops from Metz should have come in line with them." Have you anything to urge against this, and do you think that the Third Army and the IV. Corps should have made an isolated advance into the interior of France without the assistance of 45,000 infantry and 14,000 cavalry? Such

hurried measures certainly offered some advantages. On the 19th August the advanced cavalry of the Third Army had encountered at St. Dizier hostile infantry belonging to De Failly's Corps, which covered the movements of the French by rail. It must no doubt have been a great temptation to resume the pursuit of those who had been defeated at Woerth, and to give them no further time for rest, reinforcement or reorganization. But the French newspapers, brought back by the advanced cavalry, left no doubt of the fact that the French main army was practically already assembled in the vicinity of Châlons, and the Supreme Command of the German Army therefore decided to wait until all available forces could be put in motion for combined action. This happened on the 23rd August.

It is an incontestable fact that time is one of the chief factors in strategy. A delay of one hour may decide a battle, a day may decide a campaign. The events of a single day, the marches, the arrival of reinforcements, etc., are capable of changing the whole situation. When a strategical operation has been determined on, there should be no delay without a good reason. Just as the momentum of a projectile is the product of the velocity and the weight of the shot, so the effect of a strategical operation is the product of time and strength. It is true that military history furnishes examples of great commanders in all ages who made up for a deficiency in their strength by the rapidity of their movements, as instanced by Frederick the Great towards the end of 1757, and Napoleon I. in 1796 and 1814. Now even if you wish to introduce your calculation of the square of the time in strategy as you do in estimating the momentum of a projectile, a certain degree of strength will always be required to produce a certain result.

This is why even the boldest strategist knows how to wait when it is necessary to do so in order to develop the requisite strength. Thus at the beginning of October,

1806, Napoleon allowed his army, though fully prepared and concentrated, to rest for two days notwithstanding that the time thus gained might have been of great advantage to his enemies. In the present case we have to do with an enemy whose strength was not accurately known, and a theatre of war of undefined extent. Without the assistance of the 45,000 infantry and the 14,000 cavalry the Third Army might suffer a check and deprive the German commanders of the advantages of mobility and the initiative, which an early advance might possibly have secured.

You will probably agree that the German Supreme Command did well to wait until the Guard and XII. Corps, and the 5th and 6th Cavalry Divisions had arrived in line with the Third Army and had been rendered capable of active operations by a day of rest.

Perhaps you consider this so obvious, that I need not have mentioned it at all ; but if so, you would simply be judging by the result. At the time there were plenty of critics who asked why the Third Army had advanced so slowly, and had then stopped altogether, instead of following up the enemy they had defeated at Woerth. The representatives of the "keep them on the move" school shook their heads over the apparent inaction of the Third Army during the battles which took place round Metz, but on recognizing that the movements of this force had been in keeping with the intentions of the Supreme Command, they transferred their criticism to the cavalry, and wondered why they had not conducted the pursuit on more strategical lines. But cavalry alone would have been useless in an encounter with the advancing hostile infantry on the 19th at St. Dizier. For the infantry of the Third Army could not, nor would it have been allowed to, rush forward to that point, while it was uncertain whether they would be required at Metz. Moreover, in the position of the 22nd August the main forces of the Third Army on the Ornain, formed an echelon half a

day's march in advance, and only the I. Bavarian and the VI. Prussian Corps, with the 2nd Cavalry Division, stood in line with the Meuse Army on the Meuse.

Now that we have discussed the completion of the strategical deployment, we will consider the selection of the points of assembly and the distribution of the troops. The Third Army was simply halted where it was at the time. Those portions of the Meuse Army which had been engaged before Metz, had to be relieved by the investing troops, and then advanced in line with the Third Army. The motives for selecting the positions of strategical deployment of the German Armies on the 22nd August are very similar to those which actuated Napoleon I. when he concentrated his army on the 6th and 7th of October, 1806. The troops simply marched from wherever they happened to be, so as to concentrate near the objective.

On the 22nd August the Meuse Army rested.

Headquarters at Jeandelize,

XII. Corps at Jeandelize,

Guard Corps at Woël,

IV. Corps at Commercy.

The four Cavalry Divisions (5th, 6th, Guard and 12th) pushed forward towards the Meuse in advance of the two corps of the right wing.

The Third Army :

Headquarters at Vaucouleurs,

I. Bavarian Corps at Void,

II. Bavarian Corps at Menil-la-Borgne,

Wurttemberg Division at Haudelincourt,

IX. Corps at Pondrecourt,

VI. Corps at Pagny,

V. Corps at Tréveray,

4th Cavalry Division at Stainville, with advanced parties at St. Dizier and Bar le Duc,

2nd Cavalry Division at Martigny les Gerbonvaux.

I refer you to the sketch in the Official Account for the general position of the Armies on the 21st and 22nd August. In looking it over you will notice a large gap between the Guard Corps and the IV. Army Corps, which was only covered by a weak screen of the Uhlan Brigade of the Guard at St. Mihiel, with advanced parties at Villotte and Neuville. This makes the IV. Corps appear to be part of the Third rather than of the Meuse Army, and caused the front of both armies to extend over more than 52 miles, thus precluding for the time being their combined action on the same day. Napoleon also took up a far more extensive position on the 6th and 7th October, than he contemplated for his operations, for we know that on those days he occupied a front of 138 miles, and which by the first marches he reduced to 38 miles. To march divided and fight united, is a condition of successful strategy, but a most difficult one to execute. On the 22nd August, 1870, it was even less necessary for the German Army to be so concentrated that all its forces could be united for combined action by a single march, than it was for Napoleon on the 6th and 7th October, 1806. The advanced cavalry reported that the hostile infantry which had advanced from St. Dizier, had retreated again, that the movements to the west by rail had ceased, and that everything pointed to a concentration of the hostile army at Châlons, and this information was confirmed by the newspapers and orders which were picked up. There was therefore no enemy nearer than Châlons against whom it would be necessary to combine all the forces, and thus the gap between the IV. and Guard Corps, and the great length of the front of the strategical deployment was not dangerous, as there was ample time to concentrate during the advance.

The plan of operations for the Third and Meuse Armies is given as follows in the Official Account :—" Since it was

of the utmost importance to oppose Marshal MacMahon's army, which was daily being reinforced by new formations, with every available man . . ." It was framed during the forenoon of the 19th August, as soon as the successes of the 18th were recognized from the first reports, and the corresponding orders were issued at 11 a.m. The plan was very simple, and consisted in advancing against the hostile forces, known to be assembling at Châlons. All available troops were held in readiness, and then marched straight against the enemy.

This action, especially after its successful termination, appears to have arisen so obviously from the circumstances, that we are almost inclined to believe that it was the only thing that could have happened. Clausewitz says, "What appears to be simple is often difficult of execution," which certainly applies to this case. For I can assure you that before the advance was carried into effect, there were many conflicting opinions on the subject ; some of those most strongly opposed to the plan were men whom we to-day recognize as authorities. They considered an advance into the interior of France, with its incalculable resources, to be most hazardous, particularly with a fortress in rear, close to which all our lines of communication passed, and which contained 200,000 men. One of our most eminent soldiers said to me on the 19th August :—"We shall now behold the return of a feature which we thought had been consigned to the lumber room. We shall build lines of circumvallation against Metz, and lines of contravallation on the Meuse, against the enemy ; the same old story, only clothed in different terms." He never contemplated an advance into the interior of France as long as 200,000 of the enemy remained in Metz in our rear.

If we consider all that is now known, we cannot fail to appreciate the dangers of that undertaking. Just think of what might have happened if Bazaine had carried out his plan of forcing his way out to the south

on the right bank of the Mosel! We now know that it was only owing to his inability to bridge the river that this sortie was not executed, otherwise it might have been successful, for although the German Armies would have pressed him hard, part of his troops would undoubtedly have reached the railway at Epinal, and thus have escaped. The communications of the Third and Meuse Armies with their base would have been cut, many of our supply columns would have fallen into the hands of the enemy, and others would, at the very least, have failed to reach their destinations. We could never have developed such strength at Sedan without sufficient ammunition, I know that the last of the ammunition columns of the Guard Corps only reached us the evening before the battle of Sedan, it having gone to Saarlouis to be replenished. The Supreme Command was however well aware of all the dangers which would be incurred by an advance on Châlons. I can tell you of a private letter from that source—*nomina sunt odiosa*—which after describing all the risks we should run, concluded with the statement that it was very hard to decide on committing oneself to such a hazardous undertaking.

On the other hand the Supreme Command of the German Army well knew the power that would have been placed in the hands of the enemy, by relinquishing the initiative and remaining on the defensive on the line of the Meuse, but it was most unwilling to lose the lead which it had hitherto held, and of the two dangers, this last seemed the greater. In this the Supreme Command acted in accordance with the five axioms which we have laid down for war :—1stly the presence of our political leaders with the army guaranteed that politics and strategy would go hand in hand, 2ndly it sought out the enemy in order to defeat him, 3rdly it employed for this purpose all the forces available, 4thly no hard and fast rules were followed, excepting those dictated by common sense, and 5thly in order to avoid confusion the idea of the advance was laid

down in general terms, the power of deciding in each case as might be necessary, and of seizing any favourable opportunities as they might occur, being reserved.

The preliminaries of this campaign are in this particular similar to those of Napoleon I. in 1806: "*Je n'ai jamais eu un plan d'operation.*" The only difference is that on the 22nd August, 1870, the Command of the German Army had fairly accurate information about the country in which the hostile forces were concentrating, and though the strength of the latter was not known yet they were taken as the sole objective; while Napoleon had very meagre information about the position of his opponents, and marched at once on their capital.

I will admit at once that the Supreme Command of the German Army was not guided by those five axioms which I laid down in my first letter, but that I deduced those axioms from the action of the former. However, that makes no difference, and does not detract from my deductions, for my sole aim in writing these letters is to point out lessons from the actual facts.

You may perhaps blame the division of the whole force detailed for the advance into two armies, and you may say that a division into only two parts seems disadvantageous. A very high authority said some time ago, that the division into two armies contributed towards the Austrian disaster at Solferino ("*The Campaign in Italy of 1859,*" by the Historical Section of the Prussian Headquarters' Staff).¹ You may therefore be surprised to find the same division into two parts ordered by the same authority on the 22nd August, 1870. A division into three or four parts is on the whole better than a division into two parts, but the difference between theory and practice is, that what must be acknowledged on general principles to be theoretically correct, cannot always be carried out in a concrete case.

¹ This book is believed to be very largely the work of Moltke.—ED.

Since on the 19th August the forces for an advance against Châlons were taken from where they were available or could be spared, it followed that the Third Army with three corps, and two cavalry divisions of the Second Army were detailed, on account of their situation at the time. It was impossible to increase the size of the Third Army, for it already consisted of $5\frac{1}{2}$ army corps and 2 cavalry divisions, nor could the commander of that army be expected to direct the movements of another 5 units. A separate command was therefore necessary for the Meuse Army. How could a division into two parts be avoided except by dividing the Third Army? It would have been a most ill-advised step to break up the latter and deprive its commander, after gaining two victories, suddenly of half his troops merely for theoretical reasons. Generally speaking, the events of 1870 appear to disprove all universally accepted theories. Clausewitz pronounced the division of an army into two parts to be most clumsy, and the Prussian staff were of the same opinion (see the work quoted above). Yet the German Army was repeatedly divided into two parts in 1870. Two Armies fought the battle of St. Privat, two Armies invested Metz and two Armies besieged Paris after gaining the victory of Sedan. Two Armies operated under Prince Frederick Charles against Orleans in December and Le Mans in January.¹ I must remind you that one of the principal axioms of strategy demands that what is most reasonable should be done, without any regard to theoretical systems. For it may at times be advisable to violate generally accepted principles on account of personal considerations when the latter are of corresponding practical value and weight.

Let us now consider the strategical deployment of the French Army, which was concentrated at the Camp of

¹ The last instance is somewhat forced, as all the troops were under Prince Frederick Charles.—ED.

Châlons. Why should it be concentrated just there and not at some other place? Châlons lay between Paris, which had to be protected, and the German Armies, and also far enough to the rear to allow time to re-form the army, which had been disorganized by defeat and the consequent retreats. Moreover there was abundant shelter there for large masses, for manœuvres had frequently taken place there in time of peace. Even without information about the enemy no one doubted that the French troops were assembled at Châlons, for it was the most natural position for the strategical deployment of the French Army. Although the French Army lost thereby the advantage of the initiative, the advantages offered by this spot were so great that no other choice could be made.

The plan of operations and the exact time of beginning the same come under quite different considerations. The principal object for the French Army was to gain time until it became as strong as possible. The French could easily have calculated the approximate strength of the German Armies and the number of those opposed to the Army of Châlons. No success could therefore be expected from any offensive movement until sufficient troops had been collected to at least equal the numbers of the German Armies. Before this happened, the whole of Vinoy's Corps which had not yet arrived, would have to be brought up. The French Army ought therefore to have quietly utilized the time gained by retreating by rail in reorganizing the units as far as possible, and then avoided a decisive action by timely retreat until strong enough to accept battle. The nearer the French Army approached Paris, their reinforcements and resources, the more the enemy would be weakened by the distance from his base and the detachments necessary to secure his communications. MacMahon was fully aware of this and intended to retire for a time towards Paris.

But a stronger power than his, or the Emperor's,

compelled him as early as the 23rd August to begin the operations to liberate Bazaine and his army.

Why was this matter so urgent? Did not Bazaine's army endure hunger and hardship until the end of October? Was the Army of Châlons uncertain how long Bazaine would be able to hold out at Metz before privation impaired the efficiency of his army for operations in the field? It is impossible to answer the last question in the affirmative. It must have been known that there was plenty of food till the end of September. The most reasonable and strategically correct measure therefore was to delay the decisive battle until the Army could accept it on equal terms.

Instead of that it was decided to advance and seek the decision, though still inferior in numbers, and though it was no secret that the troops, part of them having been recently defeated, and part consisting of new and untrained levies, were not equal to an enemy flushed with victory. This decision was taken because those forming it were no longer able to use their common sense, but were compelled to follow the hot-headed and immature ideas of the Regency, which in turn felt obliged to defer to the bugbear of so-called "public opinion." The wild shouts of the Paris mob, swayed by the most various passions, and inaccessible to reason or argument, were taken for this "public opinion."

The Army of Châlons was thus compelled to take the offensive prematurely, before its strength or condition warranted it. The movement, by a strange coincidence, was commenced on the 23rd August, the same day as that of the two German Armies on the Meuse.

Were I to point out the lessons to be learned from the fact that the vagaries of the Paris street politicians forced MacMahon and the Emperor, who accompanied him, into a hasty and ill-considered enterprise, I should have to repeat everything which I have already written about France having begun the war. In the course of events

we shall see how unfavourably these motive powers acted on the direction of the French Army up to the 1st September.

On the 20th August, before the commencement of the operations, MacMahon moved the Army from Châlons back to Rheims. This movement was neither a retreat on Paris, nor an operation for the deliverance of Bazaine: the Official Account calls it a half-measure. MacMahon, it is said, was prompted to this movement because his right flank was menaced by the approach of the Crown Prince of Prussia from the south. He should rather have moved south, towards the German line of approach on Paris. On the evening of the 18th the Emperor had received Bazaine's report of the battle on the 16th, in which the latter expressed the intention of continuing his march to the west; if MacMahon wished to join him, he should have marched on Vouziers, instead of back to Rheims, and thus this movement failed to accomplish either of the objects it was intended to fulfil. It is most instructive to investigate the motives which prompted the experienced and prudent MacMahon to take this course.

At the council of war after which, on the 17th August, the command of the Army of Châlons was transferred to MacMahon, it had been particularly emphasized that the Army of Châlons should remain under the orders of Marshal Bazaine; thus MacMahon had three superiors: Bazaine, with whom communication became daily more doubtful; the Regency in Paris, which daily arrogated to itself more and more authority over the Emperor, although it had only been established for the emergency of his absence; and lastly the Emperor himself, who was present with the Army. On this occasion the latter seems to have divested himself of the dictatorship which he had exercised for twenty years, and acted as a critical spectator; for Wimpffen has made certain statements in his book which intimate that it was the Emperor's in.

tention to make his generals responsible beforehand for any disaster which might occur, but to claim the credit of all the successes for himself.

It is impossible that MacMahon, having daily to report the decisions arrived at to his Sovereign, should have remained entirely uninfluenced by the comments and opinions of the latter, and it is equally impossible that he should have been able to act correctly, involved as he was in the necessity of obeying three conflicting orders. It was this "parallelogram of forces" which drove MacMahon to Rheims, and he immediately requested Bazaine, who was now his immediate superior, to send him instructions, but this Bazaine refused to do, saying the distance was too great, and advised him to rely on his own judgment. There were, however, still two courses before MacMahon, one was his union with Bazaine which drew him to the east, the other the protection of Paris drawing him to the west. Moreover he was expected to perform both these tasks at one and the same time, and the only enterprise which could have solved both these problems, i.e. the defeat of the Armies of the two Crown Princes, he did not feel strong enough to carry out.

You will ask how it happened that MacMahon was placed in a position in which the limits of his authority were not clearly defined, especially at so critical a moment, and why the Emperor, since he for some reason or another believed himself incapable of assuming it himself, did not confer the Supreme Command on MacMahon. I cannot help suspecting, although it is a mere supposition on my part, that it was on account of the Marshal's well-known Legitimistic sympathies. Rumours of their mutual dislike had been spread ever since the battle of Magenta, but that a sovereign should allow such an estrangement to influence the dictates of common sense, will certainly not improve the chances of success. "Le chef-d'œuvre de balance" here proved an entire failure. On the 21st August MacMahon took up a new

position near Rheims. The 7th Corps was at Sillery, the 1st Corps at Cormontreuil, the 5th Corps at Ormes and Champigny, and the 12th Corps at La Neuville.

This position is so concentrated that its front covers barely more than $9\frac{1}{2}$ miles. Men could hardly be placed closer together on the eve of a decisive battle. What prompted MacMahon to take up this position? His so doing must have entailed difficulties with the supplies and shelter, and must have precluded the possibility of requisitioning, etc.; besides the enemy was known to be 70 miles away, and his troops might have been extended over a distance of 24 miles between Châlons and Rheims without any danger. There was also a separate railway from each of these two places to Paris, which afforded great facilities for retreat if necessary. Did the condition of the 1st and 5th Corps, after their disordered flight, and that of the new formations in the other Corps, render it desirable that they should camp in close masses, in order to supervise them better, and to improve their "moral"? We here encounter a factor which after-criticism cannot duly weigh. You must therefore not be surprised if I prefer to remain silent on this point. One might simply say that MacMahon's spirit was not great and strong enough, and that it is characteristic of all feeble-minded men, unequal to their task, to want to have everything close about themselves. We, however, do not intend to criticize individuals, but to profit and learn from facts.

Whilst the concentrated position near Rheims was being taken up, Rouher (the Minister) arrived from Paris on the 21st August and delivered the direct demand of the Regency, that the Army of Châlons should advance to relieve Bazaine. Although totally uninformed about the latter, MacMahon knew that the Army of the Rhine was invested by 200,000 Germans; that the Meuse Army with 80,000 men was between Metz and Verdun; and that the Crown Prince of Prussia was moving in the

direction of Vitry with 150,000 men. He based his protest against the demand of the Regency on these facts, and announced his determination of beginning his retreat to Paris on the 23rd.

All preparations had been made when a despatch from Bazaine of the 19th August arrived on the afternoon of the 22nd (Official Account) containing the information that he had fought a battle on the 18th August, that his Army must have two or three days' rest, and that he expected to cut his way out to the north by way of Montmédy. MacMahon had therefore to consider it quite possible that Bazaine had begun this movement on the 21st or 22nd; he therefore decided to start on the 23rd towards Stenay to effect the junction with Bazaine. On the evening of the 22nd a despatch from Rouher arrived at Rheims reiterating the Government's former demand.

Were I to attempt to investigate the prospects of success this enterprise might have had if carried out without hesitation or delay, you might reasonably reply that it would be useless. For if MacMahon felt himself too weak to defeat the two Crown Princes, he could still less risk a turning movement against them. In a turning movement your own flank is laid open to the enemy, and only when you are superior to your opponent may a turning movement be undertaken. But an investigation into what a more determined and uninterrupted advance by MacMahon would have brought about is too interesting for me to resist the temptation.

The average daily march of a large army during a prolonged series of marches without halts is hardly ever more than 10 miles, anything beyond this is a forced march and is only possible with well-disciplined troops. Supposing the Army of Châlons to have had such discipline (which can hardly be true of all the troops of that Army, judging from the reports published, and from the dense encampment near Rheims) an average daily march would be the most you could reckon on. (Napoleon's

corps in 1806, which marched splendidly, averaged 14, 16 and 17 miles a day, Davout alone 19 miles, the Prussian Guard averaged 14 miles before St. Privat and 17 before Sedan). At the rate of 14 miles a day the Army of Châlons could reach the Meuse at Dun, Stenay and Wurzon on the 26th August with the advanced troops only, for the distance to these points from Rheims is 57 miles as the crow flies. Such an energetic advance would have brought the operation much sooner to the notice of the Germans than the actual and much slower movement did. Still, take the most favourable case and suppose that in spite of this rapid advance the Germans heard of it so late, that they could not conform to it before the 26th August. The Supreme Command of the German Armies would at once have moved the corps to the north, as was actually done, and placed two corps from the Army investing Metz in readiness at Etain and Briey. The XII. Corps would have come into contact with the enemy on the 26th (its leading troops actually reached Dun on that day), and moved its headquarters more eastward to the Meuse, perhaps to Consenvoye. The Guard Corps would have reached Dombasle, the IV. Corps Ippécourt and the II. Bavarian Corps Triaucourt on the same date.

What would have happened then? The French Army required at least two days more to reach Etain from Dun and Stenay, and it is doubtful, nay improbable, that it could have attacked there on the 28th August. On that day, however, the whole Meuse Army if credited with equal speed, could have joined the two corps at Etain, whilst the II. Bavarian, turning Verdun by the south, could have taken post in their rear, about Henneville.

If you assume the result of the battle at Etain between the Army of Châlons and the Meuse Army, reinforced by these two corps, to have been doubtful and that it was possible for the left wing of this Army to join Bazaine, who had cut his way out at Noisseville and was approach-

ing through Thionville,—what then? The investing Army would have clung to Bazaine during his retreat to the east and south, and his army, without supplies or reserves of ammunition, would soon have lost its efficiency in the open field. The remainder of the Third Army, five corps, would have followed the Army of Châlons from the west, and both Marshals might have suffered the same fate north of Etain and before the 1st September, which actually befell the Army of Châlons at Sedan. Or both Armies might have been forced into Metz, where on account of the greater number of men they would have succumbed to privation sooner than Bazaine's Army did. I even believe that under certain circumstances the German Supreme Command would have opened the lines of investment at Metz to let these Armies enter as Bonaparte did before Mantua. At any rate the ruin of both armies would have been accomplished sooner than was actually the case.

On a former occasion I pointed out to you the analogy between the movements of the Army of Châlons round the right flank of the German forces and those of Napoleon's Army from the 1st to the 4th June, 1859, round the right flank of the Austrian Army. One is inclined to believe that Napoleon was repeating the same experiment because it succeeded in 1859. He certainly could not help remembering his apprehensions of an attack from the south on the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th June, 1859, although on that occasion the numerical superiority was on his side. I think his experience of 1859 would rather have deterred him from a repetition of that strategical movement as long as the enemy was superior in numbers. He, as well as MacMahon, probably felt considerable disinclination to undertake the execution of the plan.

It almost seems to me as though MacMahon had never seriously intended to carry out the idea of effecting a junction with Bazaine. He was correctly informed about the enemy, and probably also calculated how far his march

would carry him each day. His subsequent half-measures and frequent counter-orders seem to indicate that he was hoping from day to day to meet an enemy approaching from the east, who would release him from the duty of further prosecuting the unreasonable plan of the Regency, and from penetrating still deeper into the *cul de sac* into which he was being forced.

If you have concluded from this that the half-measures and counter-orders, and the unhappy final result were again the consequences of want of harmony between politics and strategy, you will perhaps quote my remarks about Gyulai's measures. I acknowledge that I then criticized his conduct for not making the ideas of his Government fully and entirely his own. That does not imply, however, that MacMahon should have made his ideas coincide with those of the Regency, for the latter was not his Government. His Sovereign was present with the Army, and the Regency owed obedience to him, if politics were to be in harmony with strategy. The Regency did not know the strategical situation; they demanded an advance from sheer fear of a riot in the streets of Paris. Where strategical measures depend on the shouts of a mob, impartial criticism must forego deducing any but negative lessons in strategy.

TWENTY-SECOND LETTER.

ORDERS AND DISPOSITIONS FOR THE 23RD AUGUST.

ON the 23rd August the two German Armies and the French Army of Châlons were to commence their movement against each other. The former received their instructions in an order from the Royal Headquarters dated at Pont-à-Mousson, 11 a.m., the 21st August, 1870, which is given verbatim in Appendix 33 of the Official Account.

This order which directed the movement of more than 200,000 combatants for the next four days, is instructive and interesting on account of its brevity. It does not fill one printed page.

The order of the 21st August might be classed either as a "disposition" or as an "instruction." In accordance with previous statements of the Official Account it should be called a "direction," for it regulates the action of the subordinate leaders for several days in advance, because the latter could not receive their orders every day on account of the distance. It cannot be called a "table" of operation, for it does not fix the headquarters of the army corps for each day according to such a scheme. This shows you that the distinction between order, disposition, instruction, direction, etc., is not yet clearly defined. Bronsart also deviates from what I was taught when I attended lectures on "the Duties of the General Staff." In those days any written orders for the movement of troops, either for march

or for battle, were called "dispositions," when they originated from divisional, or higher, headquarters; all other orders originating with these authorities, and all orders for marches and battles proceeding from smaller units, were simply called "orders." Bronsart places the distinction higher up and thinks that divisions (unless detached) should be governed by "orders" only.

As a matter of fact the name makes no real difference. The main point is that the arrangements should be correctly made and the orders correctly worded.

The order before us is as instructive on account of what it does contain as on account of what it does not contain, and by the manner in which it complies with the requirement of omitting all superfluous matter.

On scrutinizing it more closely you will find, that in the first place it informs the army commanders of the news about the enemy and of our own intentions.

As regards the former you will notice at once that the Royal Headquarters did not possess complete information about the enemy. Only two corps, new formations and individual regiments, were known to be assembling at Châlons. It was not known that on the same day the Army of Châlons composed of four strong corps was organized and concentrated there and was already in position to march off to Rheims on the same day.

I do not think you can blame the Royal Headquarters or indeed anyone for this. The distance to Châlons was 72 miles; at that distance no news could be expected from patrols, and information furnished by spies, had there been any, would have been at least four days old. It was sufficient to know that the enemy would be found in the vicinity of Châlons.

Perhaps you will think that (conforming to my opinions expressed on a former occasion) I ought to blame the Royal Headquarters for issuing orders four days in advance. Orders were, however, issued only so far in advance because it was expected that the movements

would not be interfered with by "the opposing, independent will" of the enemy. For if the assumption was correct that the Army of Châlons was still in process of formation and incapable of active operations, the Royal Headquarters were justified in believing that it would be possible to approach the enemy to within two days' march without any interference from the latter.

You may be surprised that as early as the 21st August, the idea is expressed of driving the enemy north and away from Paris, while according to my previous deductions the question, up to the moment of actual collision, is simply one of seeking the enemy and defeating him, but *how* this is to be done cannot be determined beforehand, and no geographical points should be mentioned before the enemy's main forces have been defeated. But on account of the convergence of the railroads, Paris in this case represented the greater part of the whole base of the army, i.e. France, though the armies organized after the 19th September were able to base themselves on other parts of the kingdom. But the wars of 1814 and 1815 justified, and the campaign of 1871 confirmed the presumption, that France would cease to resist after the fall of Paris. If therefore the hostile forces were cut from Paris and deprived of this base, and if Paris were rendered defenceless, the advantage would be two-fold, and justify the formulation, at this time, of the plan of threatening the flank of the field army, especially as the German Armies were conscious of their superiority and could risk flanking and turning movements, provided they acted with celerity before reinforcements gave the enemy an equality of numbers.

The intention of turning the right and not the left flank of the enemy, was due in the first place to the initial position of the Armies. As it was, the weaker (Meuse) Army was directly in front of the enemy, the stronger (Third) Army, more capable on that account of a flanking movement, was opposite the enemy's right

flank. To turn the enemy's left flank and drive the Army of Châlons southward and away from Paris, would have required several days more, especially as the Meuse Army was half a day's march in rear. Had this movement been successful, the French Army would have been driven from the base of Paris; but only for a few days. It would have been driven into the interior of France, on which it might base itself, and from which it might even reach Paris in time to defend it by means of the numerous existing railway lines. If the enemy's right flank were turned he would be driven northwards to the frontier and his destruction.

All this is so clear and simple, particularly now after the subsequent events, that you might think there was no necessity to waste so many words over it, just as there is no necessity to prove that the sun shines and gives out heat. I mention these things merely to prove that the Supreme Command of the German Army had good reasons on the 21st August for giving an objective which the result of every argument pointed out. I remember that the only anxiety felt in our Army was, that the Army of Châlons might retire on Paris and avoid a decisive action. You see from this, that though by MacMahon's movement the Supreme Command was surprised, the surprise was a pleasant one, for it brought about the identical situation wished for.

As regards detail, the order in question prescribes that on the 26th August the advance guards of the Meuse Army should reach the line St. Menehould—Doncourt—Givry-en-Argonne, and those of the Third Army the line St. Mard sur le Mont—Vitry le Français. This geographical delimitation determined the degree of concentration which the Royal Headquarters desired from the two armies on the 26th August. The Meuse Army was given a front of a little over 10 and the Third Army a little over 19 miles, total about 30 miles. This formation is dense enough to move against an enemy two marches distant, and to unite

on the march for combined action. The chief object of naming the destinations to be reached in four days' marching was to prevent a crossing of the armies and the confusion resulting therefrom. You will perhaps notice the absence of any line of demarcation between the Meuse and Third Armies so as to prevent the left flank corps of the former from occupying places and making requisitions in localities claimed by the right flank corps of the latter. But we were advancing into an unknown country of which we had maps, but no other knowledge as to its resources and capacity. It would have been wrong to designate a road as the line of demarcation, for then both corps might perhaps have wanted to use it or both might have avoided it. Nothing remained therefore but to leave the matter to be settled by the two corps in question.

You will, I expect, object that the designation of the lines which the advance guards of the two Armies were to reach on the 26th August, might easily have induced them to take measures out of harmony with the intentions of the Royal Headquarters should the enemy perchance be met on the march. Had the Army of Châlons advanced straight against the Meuse Army and attacked it on the 25th, the Royal Headquarters would have wished the latter to remain on the defensive against superior numbers, until the Third Army had found time to take the offensive against the enemy's right flank. In that case the specific order to reach a certain line by the 26th might cause the Meuse Army to take an energetic offensive against superior numbers, for the sole purpose of reaching at any cost the indicated destination, just as for the same reason the Third Army might fail to come to its assistance. This might give the enemy an opportunity to inflict a crushing defeat on the Meuse Army. I think that the Royal Headquarters precluded such strict adherence to the letter of the order by stating the object of the movement in the beginning. It was therefore understood that

if an opportunity was offered to reach the object earlier, the Armies would act accordingly. I will admit that the expression which regulates the movement of the Third Army is more happily worded than the one referring to the Meuse Army. In the latter case it reads: "where the advance guards must arrive"; in the former case: "the Army will start so that the advance guards arrive." The latter expression is a definite order only for the beginning of the march and more elastic for application to circumstances. I can imagine your joy over my admission that the wording of any order issued by the Royal Headquarters in 1870 is open to criticism, since I have repeatedly incurred your displeasure by invariably declaring them to be models.

I must now invite your attention to another sentence of the same order which contains a complete instruction in one line. It reads: "Verdun is to be taken by a *coup de main*, or to be observed and turned by the south." From these few words it appears, that the Royal Headquarters was very anxious that Verdun should be taken by *coup de main* if possible. It was, however, not on the spot, and therefore unable to judge whether it would be advisable to undertake the *coup*, or how much would have to be risked. All that must be left to the judgment of the commander of the Meuse Army. Should he deem it impracticable, or should the attempt fail, the words "to be observed and turned by the south" direct him not to extend too far to the north, because he was to remain always ready for concentration, at the same time he was cautioned against leaving too many troops before Verdun or investing the place, he was merely to observe it so as to keep as many troops as possible available from active operations.

If the commander of the Austrian Army in 1859 had desired such an operation, he would have issued sheets of dispositions for all three possible cases. The Royal Headquarters of the Prussian Army of 1806 would have

summoned a council of war and deliberated for several hours if not days.

By wording the order in the way it did the Royal Headquarters left the commander of the Meuse Army free to form his own decision, and thereby invited initiative in resolution and action on his part.

In order not to leave any part of the order undiscussed, please note that the concluding sentence states where the Royal Headquarters will move to on the 23rd August. That sentence should always be given in order to inform the subordinates where to send their reports. It once happened to me on active service, that this information was not given in a disposition of one of my superiors. This proved very embarrassing to me.

I must now ask you to consider all that is not contained in this order, but what most men charged with the preparation of such instructions would have inserted. In the first place there is no assumption of various cases, and detailed instructions how to act in each (see Gyulai's dispositions). Here it might happen: 1. That the enemy might await the approach of the German Armies at Châlons; 2. he might fall back toward Paris; 3. he might throw himself on the Meuse Army to defeat it singly; 4. he might retire south to take up the defensive against the stronger of our Armies, i.e. the Third; 5. or take the offensive against the Third Army.

Certainly no one would have assumed the case which actually happened, that the enemy would do what the German Armies were endeavouring to bring about, i.e. that he would relinquish communication with his base and turn north-east. That would have brought about an emergency not provided for in the dispositions. The order of the 21st August, however, assumes no case whatever. It merely informs the subordinate leaders of the ideas and intentions of the Royal

Headquarters and leaves them free to act on emergency, on their own responsibility and in accordance with these instructions, until, the circumstances having been reported, further orders were issued by the Royal Headquarters. In this manner the order arouses the initiative of the subordinate commanders, while on the other hand it enables the Royal Headquarters to retain the power of deciding as each emergency arises and to improve every opportunity for accomplishing the chief aim, the destruction of the hostile forces. For you are probably convinced, that all these cases were duly weighed at the Royal Headquarters. They were not mentioned in the order, however, in order not to anticipate events, tie the leaders' hands, or "play the music of the future."

Not even the daily halting-places of the corps are laid down for each of the four days. Most staff officers charged with the preparation of such an order would have been tempted to issue at least a "table of operations" indicating the place of headquarters of each corps for each of the four days, as was done by the Headquarters of the Second Army on the occasion of our invasion of Bohemia in 1866. The Supreme Command left that to the commanders of the Armies as belonging to their sphere of action. Nor did the Royal Headquarters interfere when the one (Meuse) Army marched with all its corps in one line, i.e. one corps deep, while the other (Third) Army advanced in two successive lines, two corps deep, so to speak, the natural result of the formation in which the armies started.

Was it advisable to leave so much freedom to these commanders? Might they not order something not in keeping with the intentions of the Royal Headquarters? Would it not have been better to forestall possible errors? It was certainly preferable to risk possible errors and then to deal with them as *faits accomplis* rather than to paralyze the initiative of the

subordinates by ill-timed interference with details, as Gyulai did, so that a certain army corps did not dare to assault the bridge of Valenza without orders, but reported most naïvely, that it could have been taken with ease.

Nor does the order in question contain instructions on matters of course. Perhaps you laugh because I make a special note of that. But please look at other dispositions! Most of them contain admonitions which would find a fit place in a text book on strategy and tactics, but which a trained army should execute without being told to do so. The Headquarters of the German Army admitted such details in its orders and dispositions only when a particular matter, such as a reconnaissance in a certain direction, was very important, or when the action of the troops gave cause for an admonition. Thus we frequently see "cavalry to the front" in the telegrams and dispositions up to the 12th August. That injunction was afterwards unnecessary. The Supreme Command were confident that the armies, corps, and advance guards would do their duty without admonition.

How is it that in many dispositions such self-evident measures are enjoined? It may be necessary with insufficiently trained troops which cannot be expected to do these things of their own accord. Thus you find it frequently in the very lengthy army orders of Chanzy, though he himself was a very competent commander. He was compelled to train his newly-formed troops and to act as instructor in the most elementary matters. Again, and this is the most frequent case, it is done by general staff officers who are too deeply versed in details, who wish never to omit the least trifle, and also in no small degree with a view to let their light shine and show that they know everything. Thus you may find that outposts are enjoined to be on the alert, to send patrols and reports at the proper time, etc.¹ When such orders are not

¹ This sentence, indeed the whole page, written as it is by a man of vast experience in war, is especially commended to the English officers

exceptionally necessary, this is wrong, for in most cases the order does not fit the case of each corps. But the result is—and that is the most objectionable point of the matter—that the troops become accustomed to having everything ordered specifically, and they then believe themselves justified in omitting the performance of anything not so ordered. They will eventually believe that the outposts need not be alert, that the enemy is being watched by other troops, if for once alertness is not specially mentioned. Again, this or that leader does not feel himself bound to report matters unless reports are expressly required. The sending of patrols is also omitted without an express order, because on former occasions it had been specifically prescribed, but was not in this case, etc.

The order in question contains nothing of this kind. By issuing orders, avoiding everything that was a matter of ordinary routine, the Royal Headquarters spurred the troops on to do their duty without being told, and when exceptional instructions were received, the troops considered them to a certain degree as a censure which they wished to avoid in the future. Orders of this character trained the sense of honour and zeal of the troops, and the commanders of the several grades considered it an encroachment on their prerogative, and as an unwarranted censure, if anything was enjoined unnecessarily. I will call to your mind but one case of a difference between a corps commander and his army commander. The latter had ordered that the packs of the infantry of the corps should be resumed by the men and no longer carried on wagons. Although the corps commander had issued orders to the same effect on the preceding day, and the order was thus without effect, he felt grieved at this interference with the interior economy of the corps and disputed the right of the army commander to such interference. This unimportant

who have laid down, in the Infantry Drill, what outpost orders are to deal with (see Infantry Drill, p. 168, 1893 Edition).—ED.

difference was soon settled, and I mention it merely as showing the prevailing methods of command, and of the interior action of the strategical machine.

Nor does this order contain details about the subsistence of the troops any more than tactics. These did not belong to the domain of strategical dispositions, but to the commissariat officers of the armies and corps. The Commissary General at Royal Headquarters issued instructions through the Army Commissaries to the Corps Commissaries, the Divisional Commissaries carrying them out. I may perhaps seem to contradict my former statements, if now I praise the army order for saying nothing about subsistence, since I showed on a former occasion, how commanders should take an energetic part in the matter of subsisting the troops and not allow the commissariat to act alone. The commander of the troops must indeed exercise a general control and see whether the measures taken are practical and carried out so that the troops will receive their rations in good time. Of that, however, nothing should be said in army orders and dispositions.

I do not know a single case during the movements from the 2nd August to the 19th September of the German troops receiving insufficient rations, except on the days of the decisive battles of St. Privat and Sedan. I am compelled therefore to consider the arrangements made by the Germans as models. The Commissary General at the Royal Headquarters made the contracts and made his requisitions on the districts through their governments. The Army Commissaries were charged with the establishment of great magazines, to which the corps were assigned. The Corps Commissaries were responsible for the transport of supplies to the troops by the corps columns and, in cases of emergency, made requisitions through the local magistrates. The Divisional Commissaries were specially charged with the distribution of the rations to the troops, who on their part carried

permanently an "iron" ration for three days, which was replenished by requisitions, and only replaced by the Divisional Commissary if the requisitions fell short of the amount needed. The achievements of the Commissariat during the war of 1870-71 are quite worthy of mention, though the troops endeavoured in the first place to live on the country. For, on an average, one-third of what was required was furnished by requisitions, two-thirds by the Commissariat.

The orders from the Royal and the Army Headquarters had nothing at all to do with supplies unless special reasons rendered interference necessary, such as to avoid irregularities, or on account of particular strategical situations, which might force the columns to avoid certain districts, or the troops to provide themselves with provisions. The corps was the highest command that dealt with the columns in orders and dispositions. The same was the case with the divisions and their baggage, or when a division was detached and acted alone, with the supply columns also. These orders sometimes stated the time, in days or parts of days, when the troops might draw what was necessary from their columns, for this should never be done when there is any prospect of a conflict with the enemy.

Care should be taken that the columns do not interfere with or delay the movements of the troops by being too near to them; but they should remain sufficiently close to issue provisions to the troops in good time.

Bronsart also mentions the question of protecting the supply columns. That should result from the strategical situation. Troops detailed to escort wagon trains which are of such endless length, will never be sufficient to protect them from a bold enterprise of even small hostile bodies. This necessity of protecting the "life-blood" of the army by means of the strategical situation makes the question of communications so important, that there have been theorists who have called strategy the science of com-

munications. For those trains that have no military organization and consist of either hired or impressed vehicles (even though the vehicles may not have been furnished by the hostile country) escorts are wanted ; but merely for the purpose of preserving order and discipline on the march, i.e. police duties. The terrible confusion of these masses of wagons, when the drivers believe themselves beyond supervision, is incredible. In the war of 1866 our supply columns were not so well organized as they were in 1870. I frequently met confused masses of farmers' wagons and teams, which completely blocked the high-road, and why ? because in front there was a public-house where the drivers fought for their turn. Such a mass of wagons once blocked my road on a march in the midst of a forest and lasting far into the night. Everybody was sound asleep on the wagons. Those whom I woke up and asked, replied that they considered it too dangerous to drive on in the dark forest, as the enemy might come upon them. I told them the enemy was close behind us. All then put themselves speedily in motion and soon reached their destination, and the road was thus cleared for my troops. The escort in such cases should consist of cavalry. One horseman can superintend ten wagons and preserve order, an infantry soldier but one.

Perhaps you will be surprised that I dwell so long on the army order of the 21st August and make so much of it. But you criticized me because up to now I have merely discussed the measures taken by the Royal Headquarters, from which you were unable to deduce much that was useful for yourself, because you are not likely to command such a large army. It may, however, easily happen that as a staff officer you will have to prepare such an order, in which case you can apply practically what we have discussed here.

The arrangements of the subordinate commanders in

executing this army order are equally instructive as models for future dispositions.

The Guard Corps to which I belonged, issued on the 22nd August a march-disposition for the 23rd, conveying in the first place the information that the army was advancing on Châlons, the XII. Army Corps in the direction of Verdun, the IV. westward by Commercy to La Vallée, that the Royal Headquarters was moving to Commercy, those of the Crown Prince of Saxony to Fresnes-en-Woëvre; secondly, the following directions, that the Cavalry Division of the Guard was to start at 6 a.m., sending the Dragoon Brigade to Neuville-en-Verdunois, the Uhlán Brigade to Villotte, that the points of these Brigades were to advance as far as Vaubécourt, communications were to be established with the 6th Cavalry Division at Heippe, with the IV. Army Corps at Rumont,¹ that the divisional headquarters and the heavy Cavalry Brigade were to move to Frésnes-au-Mont and the horse battery attached to the Uhlán Brigade for the time being was to be sent back to the Corps Artillery.

The 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard was to start at 6 a.m., its advance guard was to reach Dompcevrin (divisional headquarters at Maizey), the rear of the column Deux-Nouds-aux-Bois.

The 1st Infantry Division of the Guard was also to start at 6 a.m., that the advance guard was to reach Les Paroches, headquarters and one battalion to St. Mihiel, rear of the column as far as Varvinay.

The Corps Artillery was to move off at 8 a.m., following the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard, and march to Challion (headquarters) and Creux.

The ammunition and supply columns were to start at 10 a.m. and march to Vigneulles and Hattonville.

Lastly it conveyed the information that Corps Headquarters would move to St. Mihiel.

¹ Rumont is situated just north of Erize-St. Dizier.

On the 22nd the Corps had halted as follows :—

1. Cavalry Division of the Guard ; the Cuirassier Brigade at St. Maurice-sous-les-Cotes, the Dragoon Brigade at Bannoncourt and Maizey and the Uhlan Brigade at St. Mihiel.

2. 1st Infantry Division of the Guard at Haumont, advance guard at Vigneulles, rear at Dampuitoux.

3. 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard at Doncourt-aux-Templiers, advance guard at Hannonville-sous-les-Cotes, rear at Latour-en-Woëvre.

4. Corps Artillery at La Chaussée.

5. Ammunition column at Xonville.

6. Headquarters at Woël.

You see therefore that all troops of the Corps advanced 15 miles in a south-west direction. This direction, as well as the limits of the country to be covered to the right and left, were prescribed in the order from Army Headquarters. By taking this direction it approached the IV. Corps and closed the gap which I mentioned above.

You will also observe that two parallel roads were used, the one on the right for the Cavalry and the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard from the vicinity of Doncourt-aux-Templiers towards the passages of the Meuse at Maizey and Bannoncourt, the other on the left in the direction of St. Mihiel on the Meuse for the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard and the Corps Artillery (cavalry protection was no longer needed on this road, for the Uhlan Brigade was already at St. Mihiel). The arrangements for the march comply with everything laid down as required by Bronsart on pages 343-345 of his work.¹ The Corps marched on two parallel roads less than 5 miles from each other, and the divisions moved into cantonments of about the same depth. The Corps Artillery marched in rear of one of the divisions. The hours prescribed for starting differed slightly. The Cavalry Division and both

¹ These refer to Lieut.-Col. Hare's translation.—ED.

Infantry Divisions were to move off at 6, the Corps Artillery at 8, the transport, etc., at 10 a.m. The reason was that the latter followed the 1st Infantry Division, and although the latter was farther to the front, the length of its column was so great that the Corps Artillery would not find the road clear much before 8 a.m. The latter with seven batteries would require an hour and three-quarters to move off. If these circumstances had not been sufficiently taken into consideration in the order for the march, the troops following in rear would have been delayed and compelled to wait, causing great and unnecessary fatigue. (Remember Bazaine's order requiring the whole army to stand ready to march at 5 a.m. on the 14th August !)

The object of this day's march was to move the Corps with its principal forces to the Meuse, both divisions in line as they had marched, and little more than 2 miles from each other ; each division sent an advance guard $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the front of the main body on the road on which it was probable that they would continue to march on the following day, i.e. the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard on the road from Neuville-en-Verdunois and the 1st to Les Paroches on the road to Pierrefitte.¹ The advanced troops of the cavalry were pushed forward as far as Vaubécourt, i.e. 23 miles from the Meuse. The Corps Artillery halted in the nearest villages close in rear of those occupied by the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard, the ammunition and supply columns were brought up close to the Corps (within 9 miles of the advance guards of the divisions). As a general rule this would have been too close. But here there was no danger, for before the enemy could have forced the line of the Meuse, the trains would have gained time to retire, the more so as the cavalry was reconnoitring 24 miles in front and would

¹ It looks on the map as though Les Paroches were lying on the road to Dompcevrin. It lies in fact at the fork of the roads St. Mihiel-Pierrefitte and St. Mihiel-Dompcevrin.

give timely warning of danger. For these reasons the troops could be accorded the comfort of having their baggage as near as possible, i.e. as near as the position of the cantonments permitted. For it is a great assistance to the troops to be able to reach their baggage and supplies quickly, i.e. the sources whence they satisfy their wants.

I take the liberty of inviting your attention to the manner in which the arrangements made by the Corps conform to Bronsart's rules. (See p. 320, etc., of his book.)

In the first place information is given of the general object and the situation of the Army. After the order issued by the Royal Headquarters on August 19th had announced to the troops the intention of seeking the enemy, the three words "advance on Châlons" sufficed to mark the situation. Then follows some information about the neighbouring corps, the Royal Headquarters and the Headquarters of the Army, all before the orders for the Guard Corps. More than this the troops need not know; but these things they must know in order that every one may understand what his position is.

Bronsart says, p. 292, that the dispositions received from superior authority should not as a rule be sent to the lower commander with additions, but that each commander should include so much of it in his own disposition as appears to be necessary to make the situation clear to his subordinates. That was done in this case as you see. Neither the order of the 21st August from the Royal Headquarters, nor the instructions of the commander of the Meuse Army are given verbatim. Such parts as are necessary for the troops to know, are given in a few lines.

Sometimes it is very embarrassing for subordinate leaders not to know certain things or to be able to see "how matters really stand." Events of great importance which have occurred in their immediate neighbourhood, they learn merely by rumour and often only read the details very much later in newspapers from home. With a view

to their own improvement officers of all ranks like to know all the orders of their superiors in detail so as to follow them on the map. I frequently heard the complaint, that all the orders were not available, and that in consequence nothing could be learnt. But the time for issuing dispositions is too limited to be utilized for satisfying curiosity however laudable, or for furnishing officers with material for reflection. All study ceases in war, and every one's work must depend on the efficiency acquired by previous study, to which war is the real examination.

You may judge how limited the time was for issuing dispositions by investigating at what hour they were dictated. On the 22nd August the dispositions of the Guard Corps for the 23rd were dictated to the officers sent to receive them, at 10.30 p.m.; on the 23rd August at 11.30 p.m. for the 24th; on the 24th August at 11.15 p.m. for the 25th August. The troops were in cantonments on a front of 5 miles with a depth of 9 miles; the advanced troops of the cavalry were 24 miles and more away during the next few days, and all were to act according to these dispositions at daybreak, i.e. within 5 or 6 hours. It would have been impossible to instruct the troops properly if another hour had been lost in dictating the entire order from Royal Headquarters and the whole of the dispositions for the Meuse Army. For the officers had yet to ride several miles to give the divisions their orders, which had to be then sent on to the brigades, the latter having to pass them to the regiments, which then gave the orders for *reveillé* and complied with the dispositions by verbal command. That is one of the reasons why we should be sparing of words.

If you read the directions given by the Guard Corps for the Cavalry Division, you might think that they contain many details which might properly be left to the commander of the Cavalry Division. That is not the case. The army commander had previously ordered how far the

cavalry was to push out its feelers, and had assigned to each Cavalry Division the country to be reconnoitred, in order that some localities might not be visited twice, others not at all.

You will perhaps be most of all surprised because the Corps order prescribed which brigades were to be employed on the right and left. The reason was that the Uhlan Brigade had been detached to St. Mihiel until now and received its orders directly from the Corps Commander. Hence the Brigade had to receive its orders from the Corps until it rejoined its Division the next day. It was moreover important for the Corps to have the stronger brigade employed on its left where communication was to be sought with the IV. Corps which was only covered by its divisional cavalry, so that the cavalry patrols would have to extend over a greater space, while towards the right communication was to be established with the screen formed by three cavalry divisions.¹ The Dragoon Brigade, after its losses in the battle of Vionville—Mars-la-Tour, was barely the strength of a regiment. In later orders the Corps Commander simply directed: "One brigade to A, one to B," etc.

I cannot refrain from inviting your attention to the term "communication" with the 6th Cavalry Division of Heippe, and with the IV. Corps at Rumont. Once before we spoke of the meaning of the term "communication" with regard to the campaign of 1859 when General Gyulai detached whole infantry brigades for the purpose of establishing communication. Here the Cavalry Division is simply ordered to establish communication at Heippe and Rumont respectively with the neighbouring troops. "How" is their affair and cannot be prescribed by the corps. For it is sufficient for a single horseman to ride to Heippe or Rumont respectively, to meet there one of a neighbouring body of troops, exchange

¹ This paragraph and those following refer to the orders issued by the G. O. C. the Guard Corps on the 23rd August.—ED.

with them a copy of the disposition of the cavalry force to which they belong, and then return to his division. The only point to be observed is that the rider should go and return safely. What may be necessary for the purpose, it is impossible for the corps to know on the preceding evening; a patrol may suffice, but if the enemy or hostile inhabitants are met, a troop, a squadron or even an engagement may be necessary. The Divisional Commander alone being present on the spot can decide that. He will then report in the evening through the officer sent to receive the orders, whether the communication with the neighbouring troops was established as ordered, or not, and in the latter case, the reason.

The Cavalry Division also received a detailed order with regard to the horse battery which was to be relieved from service with the Uhlan Brigade and to rejoin the Corps Artillery. The Corps Commander had laid down the rule that horse artillery was to be attached to cavalry only when the latter was to fight independently. When the cavalry was merely charged with the duty of observation, the horse artillery was ordered back to the Corps Artillery, the main fighting body. In this manner the action of the horse artillery was doubled, it could assist the cavalry division in an isolated engagement or increase the fire of the corps artillery in battle. When therefore the Uhlan Brigade was detached to St. Mihiel, a horse battery was attached to it, and remanded to its own "brigade division" as soon as the detached service of the Uhlan Brigade ceased. This is one of the advantages gained by placing a cavalry division under the orders of a corps commander, for the latter has no authority to order the artillery of a cavalry division which is under the direct orders of the army commander to rejoin the corps artillery in order to reinforce the line of battle. To place a cavalry division under the orders of a corps is, however, as a rule, so disadvantageous, that it is better in most cases to let it act independently

under the direct orders of the army commander. For when the cavalry division is to be pushed far to the front, the transmission of orders from the army commander through the headquarters of the corps may easily cause a great delay. It might happen that the cavalry division received the orders too late for timely execution. You will understand that when you consider that the orders are not issued from corps headquarters before 10.30 or 11.30 p.m. A cavalry division whose advanced parties are three days' marches, and staff therefore at least two days' marches (28 miles) in front of the corps headquarters, cannot receive such an order in time. Bronsart lays great stress on certainty in transmitting of orders. If the divisions receive their orders direct from army headquarters, several hours will be saved. For that reason the cavalry divisions were usually placed directly under the army command, without any intermediate commander, although during the first ten days of August the cavalry divisions of the Second Army were temporarily, and exceptionally, distributed among the corps while the latter in the first line remained more or less halted in order to complete the deployment of the army.

The corps orders in question laid down the halting places of the headquarters of the cavalry division as well as of the other divisions. That was necessary so that there should be no doubt at the corps headquarters where to send an orderly when orders had to be suddenly issued to the division. The same practice was invariably followed by the army commander in issuing orders to the several corps. Since in most cases these arrangements have to be made before the country has been occupied, it is impossible to know beforehand whether the place is suitable for the accommodation of a headquarters, and the latter have to make the best of the circumstances. Thus it frequently happened that a mile away suitable quarters might have been found, while in the place assigned it was barely possible to transact business in a

regular manner. On one occasion the twenty-five officers of the Guard Corps Headquarters could not find a place to eat their dinner together, except the yard adjoining a farmhouse. Attracted by the savour of the dishes, the farmer's pigs pushed their snouts through the holes cut in the doors of their stalls and entertained us with their grunting in a manner not particularly enjoyable. Such disagreeables cannot be helped and must be put up with just as the headquarters are sometimes compelled to bivouac. Only once, just before the battle of Sedan, was the headquarters of the Guard Corps unable to reach its appointed quarters, because the enemy was still in possession of it and could not be driven out till after dark.

The other parts of the corps order may be discussed in a few words. Only the position of the headquarters, the advance guards, and the rear of the columns are pointed out to the two Infantry Divisions, and the roads to be followed were indicated. No special order need be given as a rule about the advance guards. Each division should know what duties its advance guard has to perform, while having received the order in its entirety it will know where the other troops are.

Circumstances may however compel a corps commander to give more detailed orders for the advance guards of the divisions. It may be necessary to instruct the advance guard of a division to hold its position a long time and order as follows: "The nth division will send a *strong* advance guard to X." Or believing it probable that the enemy will attack the advance guard it may be ordered to bivouac, in order that no time may be wasted in getting ready for action. When special stress is laid on holding a certain point for a long time by the advance guard, the corps would order: "The farm Y is to be strongly occupied," and if actual danger threaten from a certain direction: "Reconnoitre particularly in the direction of Z," or the order may be given:

"The advance guard will take special measures for security against the west and south." In our case no such cautions were called for. Whenever the cavalry was able to occupy unmolested their section of the country, an attack on the advance guards was very improbable.

The instructions as to how far to the rear the end of the divisional columns might be allowed to be, was necessary in order to be able to compute the time of concentration at some particular point, and in addition to leave room for the cantonments of the troops following in rear. If you take the French staff map, you will perhaps find that the troops were frequently very crowded in their cantonments, as the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard was in this instance. But the French farmsteads and villages offered a great deal of shelter for passing the night. On a subsequent occasion my staff, another brigade staff, and a whole battalion were quartered in one place, yet every one managed to get under cover. The number of combatants had of course been terribly diminished in the battle of St. Privat, so that the infantry units were barely two-thirds, some battalions less than half their full strength.

Lastly I must tell you, that our Corps Commander numbered the several paragraphs of his orders. This is an important point and adds much to their clearness. Throughout the campaign the commander of the Guard Corps followed a fixed plan, which stood the test very well. After stating the situation, the Headquarters of His Majesty the King, and of the Army Commander, and after mentioning the neighbouring troops, the instructions followed: 1. for the Cavalry Division, 2. and 3. for the two Infantry Divisions, 4. for the Corps Artillery, 5. for the ammunition and baggage columns, and 6. the position of the corps headquarters. We thus obtained the two-fold advantage that routine would hardly allow anything to be forgotten, and

that each unit soon knew where to look for what concerned it. The chief staff officer of the Corps had gained such skill that even if the orders from Army Headquarters were received during the march, he would, having first consulted the Corps Commander, unfold his map on horseback at the end of the march, and dictate the disposition to the assembled orderly officers. In this manner the troops received their orders for the next morning as soon as they moved into the new cantonments, gained more time to provide for their wants, and knew how long they might expect to rest without being disturbed. This is of incalculable value for the preservation of the troops. A staff officer was invariably detailed to take down the dispositions dictated by the chief of staff; one of the orderly officers then read his copy aloud, and the rest compared what was read with what they had written in their note-books, in order to exclude the possibility of any mistake or misunderstanding.

Do not be surprised at my dwelling so long over the details with regard to issuing orders. Of course they form only the elementary portion of the mechanical part of strategy. But what is the use of the finest, best, and most brilliant dispositions, if they reach the troops mutilated, full of mistakes, unintelligible, or too late?

Considering the brevity of the corps orders for the 23rd August and seeing that the subordinate commanders were required to carry out all details arising from them, you might perhaps think that practical strategy requires but little work, because a brief disposition like this can be written down in fifteen minutes. But you know as well as I do, how hard it is to say much in few words. Goethe himself once apologized to a friend for writing a long letter, because he had no time to write a short one. It should moreover be remembered that in making these strategical arrangements the General commanding the army corps with his chief of the staff must follow the orders from army

headquarters closely on the map, discuss the measures, form his decisions and discuss them, before they can be shaped into orders. This requires considerable calculation, frequently under difficulties, and much time is often lost on this account. Moreover as regards the measures which the troops take on their own initiative without orders from superior authority, instructions must be issued which though intended to remain in force for some time, yet are subject to frequent alteration, and in that case must be regulated by special orders. For instance, the arrangements made by the Commissariat to procure, transport and distribute provisions will differ with circumstances. Alterations can, however, be made only with the approval of the Corps Commander and in harmony with the strategical dispositions which in turn must frequently be modified to suit the requirements of food supplies. The supply of ammunition is under the charge of the Commander of the Corps Artillery, whose orders likewise require the approval of the Corps Commander if they are not to be in conflict with the orders issued for the troops. All these points must be considered and well weighed.

I drew your attention once before to the pamphlet on "strategical-tactical problems" in which the various matters are mentioned which accumulated in one day in the office of a division acting independently. It is the same at the headquarters of a corps. Taking all this into consideration, it is by no means easy to write a faultless disposition for the march of an army corps even under the simplest circumstances, as in the case before us, when collision with the enemy was not anticipated.

TWENTY-THIRD LETTER.

THE 23RD AUGUST.

ON the 23rd August the German Armies executed the marches ordered.

You can read in the Official Account the points reached by the army corps and independent cavalry divisions, viz.

The headquarters of the Meuse Army moved to
Frésnes-en-Woëvre,

The 5th Cavalry Division to Neuville, below Verdun,

The 12th Cavalry Division to Dieue,

The 6th Cavalry Division to Génicourt, above
Verdun,

The Cavalry Division of the Guard to Frésnes-au-
Mont.

These masses of cavalry had pushed detachments to Senoncourt, Souilly, Mondrecourt, Neuville-en-Verdunois, Erize-la-Petite, Rosne and Erize-la-Brulée. The corps of the Meuse Army reached Haudimont (XII.), St. Mihiel (Guards) and Vadonville (IV.).

The headquarters of the III. Army moved to Ligny-en-Barrois.

Of the advanced cavalry a Bavarian brigade reached Bar-le-Duc and Mussey, the 4th Cavalry Division St. Dizier, its advance guard Perthes, two squadrons of dragoons rode from Vitry into the country east of Châlons.

In rear of this screen of cavalry :

The II. Bavarian Corps reached the country north-west of Ligny-en-Barrois,

The V. Corps and the Wurttemberg Division, Stainville and Menil,

The XI. Corps, Montiers.

Each corps had thrown out advance guards.

In the second line :

The I. Bavarian Corps moved to St. Aubin,

The VI. Army Corps to Gondrecourt.

The 2nd Cavalry Division was in line with the corps of the second line on the left wing at Chassey, south-west of Gondrecourt.

The Royal Headquarters were established at Commercy.

The line formed by the cavalry in front of the army extended S.S.W. from the vicinity of Verdun to St. Dizier. Two squadrons had ridden 33 miles further to the vicinity of Châlons.

The sketch in the Official Account for the 23rd August shows all this more clearly than I can describe it.

In this distribution of the troops you will perhaps note that the headquarters of the Meuse Army was established in rear of the right flank of this front of 33 miles and, one might almost say, as far as possible from the Royal Headquarters. The transmission of orders would thereby certainly be delayed, and in case of emergency timely alterations of the measures ordered would be rendered doubtful. In view of the distance of the enemy's main force, however, such emergencies were not to be anticipated for the 23rd and 24th August. The Headquarters of the Army might therefore take up quarters thus far to the flank for the purpose of witnessing the *coup de main* against Verdun.

As you have expressed the wish I will add here the events I witnessed with the Guard Corps.

Nothing of much importance happened. The march was made in a pouring rain, but the arrangements had all been so happily made and the hours of starting so accurately timed, that all the troops, battalions, batteries, etc., marched off without any bother, as though each of them was making an ordinary march in peace time. For this reason the march compared with former efforts was a mere walk, although all parts of the corps covered more than 14 miles, almost a forced march. You see here the great strategical importance of the manner in which the details of the staff duties are carried out, which at first sight appear so dry, dull and tedious.

The greater the method with which the general staff officer weighs and considers every point, the longer will the troops remain efficient for battle and marching. The troops reached the quarters assigned them between 12 and 1 p.m. in the best of spirits.

The advanced parties of our Cavalry Division did not encounter the enemy. Excepting the reconnaissance of Verdun and a renewed attempt on Toul, there was no collision with the enemy. But the two squadrons of dragoons which had reached the vicinity of Châlons, reported that the town was unoccupied by the enemy and that the inhabitants stated that the camp was occupied by Garde Mobile only. This was confirmed by rumours from other quarters. For this reason the Royal Headquarters for once issued an order entering more into details and directed the commander of the Third Army to discover the enemy's direction of march as soon as possible. The Crown Prince accordingly ordered the 4th Cavalry Division to cross the Marne south of Vitry on the 24th August and to advance on the left bank of this river against Châlons, Vertus and Epernay, whilst the Wurttemberg Cavalry was ordered to do the same on the right bank. On receiving a report

of the presence of 6000 Gardes Mobiles at Langres, the 2nd Cavalry Division was ordered to advance at once from Chassey to Arcis-sur-Aube through Vassy and to destroy the railway between Troyes and Mery-sur-Seine.

The Official Account makes no mention of this, but from the orders to the cavalry you will infer, as I do, that the opinion prevailed at the headquarters of the Third Army that the enemy had retired to the right (south) rather than to the north. The great distance to which the cavalry was sent to the south to surround the enemy indicates that this was believed to be necessary in order to act in harmony with the intentions of the Royal Headquarters and drive the enemy to the north away from Paris.

The French army began its march as ordered on the 23rd August and reached the Suippe, i.e. it arrived as far east as it had been three days before at Châlons.

The 7th Corps reached Dontrien and covered its right flank by posting one division at Prosnes. The 1st Corps reached Béthenieville, the 5th Pont-Faverger, the 12th St. Mames, Bonnemain's Cavalry Division advanced to Auberive and subsequently to Pont-Faverger, Margueritte's Cavalry Division arrived in the vicinity of the passes over the Argonnes at Monthois near Vouziers.

You may infer from this that a part of the troops passed very close to the camp of Châlons which they had just left. It almost seems as if their object had been to kill time. It is hard to understand against whom the 7th Corps found it necessary to protect its right flank at Prosnes. No encounter with the enemy could be expected on that day.

The despatch of Margueritte's Cavalry Division to Monthois south of Vouziers is the first correct use of cavalry by the French army as a screen or for reconnoitring. There is no apparent reason for moving it

on the same day more toward the left flank, mid-way between two infantry corps, at the same time crossing and interfering with the marches of the latter.

The infantry corps in general advanced 9 miles and the whole army was distributed over a front of 14 miles.

In spite of the shortness of the march we read that the Army did not reach its quarters on the Suippe until late in the evening in a pouring rain, so that the distribution of rations had to be postponed till the following day on this account. Many columns crossed each other and the roads were blocked with the baggage columns. Defective arrangements and all kinds of irregularities are complained of.

Unfortunately we do not possess the detailed orders issued by the army, and corps, headquarters. They no doubt contain much that is instructive and would certainly demonstrate that many of the irregularities were simply the consequences of unpractical arrangements, perhaps also of a negligent expression in this or that order which was bound to cause exhaustion and privation to the troops. Still many things can be shown to be due to them.

The frontage of the camp near Reims, which the army quitted on the morning of the 23rd, was only 9 miles. The army now moved into camp on a front of 14 miles.

There could barely have been a separate road for each corps, certainly not for each division. Even in the most densely populated districts in the world parallel roads do not lie so close together. It was thus impossible to ease the marching of the troops by shortening the columns.

It was impossible for the French army to march in the comfortable manner in which the Prussian Guard Corps did, since the latter we allowed to march off successively and take up their quarters which extended over a depth of 5 miles. The French army bivouacked in the open in

closely packed masses. These moved forward in the same dense formation after waiting for hours under arms for their turn. The least misunderstanding, the smallest oversight of the Staff, the slightest negligence or carelessness was bound to produce among these dense masses and their baggage a confusion which would require much time and exertion to regulate. At the end of such a slow, fatiguing march, by which little progress forward was made, the unfortunate troops had to bivouac and the distribution of rations had to be postponed for the following day because the troops reached their destination too late at night !

The Marshal had issued orders at Reims that the army was to be provided with four days' rations. Whoever has witnessed the issue of provisions from a magazine can tell you, that an army crowded together on a front of 9 miles, could not draw four days' rations in one day, unless expense-magazines were established with great care for each division in front of the gates of Reims, so that the divisional transport sent for the rations did not cross, or block the roads outside the gates or in the town. I greatly doubt whether this would have been possible, for the decision to move to Reims was formed and carried out suddenly and the Commissariat could not possibly have had time to make such extensive arrangements. The last trains carrying the troops of the 7th Corps from Belfort to Châlons had at the last moment been directed to Reims by way of Paris instead of to Châlons, and did not arrive there until the 22nd August. The town was in no way prepared for the accumulation of so many troops. I can imagine that on the 22nd August a terrible confusion of provision wagons must have taken place in Reims. I am therefore not surprised that Ducrot and Lebrun reported as early as the evening of the 23rd August, that their troops were short of the absolute necessities of life for the following days. I do not think that it can have been due to disobedience of orders

that the troops did not get four days' rations on the 22nd as ordered by the Marshal. For every commander considers himself lucky when he can procure provisions for his troops. What is impossible should never be ordered ; still less should it be expected that such orders can be obeyed.

It is said that Napoleon I. laid down as a general principle that impossibilities should be demanded from the soldier in order that he should do his very utmost. That principle destroyed his army in Russia and hunted his other army to death between the 23rd August and the 18th October, 1813. The Royal Headquarters of the German army in 1870-71 never asked the troops to do what was impossible. It could therefore always rely on its orders being executed, for the troops invariably considered their orders as "Kismet," that which must be fulfilled, and it never entered their heads that it was possible to do less than was ordered. The strategy of a commander of an army is correct only when his orders are compatible with the possibility of execution. It is only then that he can rely on his orders being strictly carried out, and make his further plans correctly.

The reported want of provisions in the Corps of Ducrot and Lebrun (1st and 12th) caused the Marshal to abstain from a further advance eastward on the 24th August, and to order a partial change of direction to the left and north in order to approach the supplies at Rethel. Does not this motive make you feel as though you were transferred into the last century when the direction of the operations depended on the existence of magazines ?

I cannot quite get rid of the idea that the Marshal—without probably knowing it—was not quite in earnest in thus justifying his deviation from an eastward march. If he had considered the march to the east as the most correct and not entered upon it against his will, he would have ordered for the 24th August, on which day according to his information he could not come into collision with

the enemy, that the army should extend over a greater front and provide itself with four days' rations by means of requisitions in the densely populated country west of the Argennes. On the 24th the 5th Corps might have reached the vicinity of Monthois, the 1st Corps Vouziers, the 7th Corps Attigny, and the 12th Corps Rethel (i.e. a front of 24 miles). Such measures would have given reality to the telegram which gave Bazaine reason to hope that the Army of Châlons would reach the Aisne on the second day of its eastward march. In that case it would have been necessary to push Margueritte's Cavalry Division to the east beyond Grand Pré, and Bonnemain's Cavalry Division south in the direction of St. Ménehould to report the enemy's approach in time.

We know, however, that MacMahon undertook the march eastward against his will and better judgment. In such a situation any pretext is welcome to justify deviation from the original path, or, at least, some hesitation in continuing it further. I can imagine that nothing would have been more welcome to the Marshal than a sudden report on the evening of the 24th to the effect that the German Meuse Army had reached the line Grand Pré-Le Chesne. Such a report would have convinced the Regency at Paris that the march ordered was impracticable, and he would have been justified in doing what he believed to be correct, i.e. to retire to the vicinity of Paris.

Thus, as early as the second day of the operations—at least I presume so from the facts—the conflict of opinions which I pointed out in my last letter, paralyzed MacMahon's operations and produced orders and counter-orders, resulting in exhaustion for his troops.

As regards the arrangements for the 24th August by the Royal Headquarters, no special orders relating to the operations were issued for that day on the 23rd, so far as I

know. Nor was there any necessity for it, for the two army commanders knew the intentions of the Supreme Command for the next few days (till the 26th), and there was no reason for any alteration.

It appears, however, from the orders of the Guard Corps for the 24th August, that orders were issued by the commander of the Meuse Army for that date.

Those of the Guard Corps informed the troops in the first place, that the march on Châlons would be resumed, that the Army headquarters would be at Mont-hairon on the 24th, and that the XII. Corps would attempt to take Verdun by a *coup de main*, without, however, delaying its march. Directions then followed for one brigade of the Cavalry Division of the Guard to march to Belval, another to Triaucourt, main body and headquarters to Vaubécourt, the line of observation to be pushed forward to the road St. Ménehould-Vitry, to seek communication with the 6th Cavalry Division by way of Foucaucourt and with the IV. Corps by way of Laheycourt. The 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard was to march *via* Maizey, advance guard as far as Issoncourt, the rear of the column to Laheimeix, and headquarters and staff to Neuville-en-Verdunois. The 1st Infantry Division of the Guard received the order: advance guard to Chaumont-sur-Aire, rear of the column as far as Rupt-devant-St. Mihiel, headquarters to Longchamp (Pierrefitte to be occupied by one battalion).

The Corps Artillery was to move to Frêsnès-au-Mont, ammunition columns to Les Paroches, the heavy baggage columns to Dompcevrin by way of Maizey, Corps Headquarters to Pierrefitte.

Hours of starting: 6 a.m. for the divisions, 8 a.m. for the baggage.

The orders were only issued half an hour before midnight on the 23rd August. The distance to the headquarters of the Meuse Army accounts for the late hour.

You will perhaps note that in giving the general

situation, the orders inform the troops that on the 24th the XII. Corps would attempt a *coup de main* on Verdun without thereby delaying its march. You might think this superfluous. Not at all, for it was necessary that the troops of the Guard Corps should not interrupt their march on hearing the cannonade from the direction of Verdun. The 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard marching on the right might have been induced to march in that direction on the principle that it is never wrong to march to where guns are heard. The troops would thus know that, notwithstanding the cannonade, they could be sure that the XII. Corps would be in line with them on their right at the end of the march.

I also point out that the Cavalry Division is no longer told which brigade is to be sent to Belval or Triaucourt.

The Cavalry Division of the Guard was to extend its line of observation to the road St. Ménehould-Vitry, 24 miles in front of the centre of the Corps (headquarters) at Pierrefitte.

The 1st Infantry Division of the Guard was specially directed to occupy Pierrefitte with one battalion and no more, for the reason that the corps headquarters was to be established there and could not remain there without an escort of infantry; but it also required accommodation for itself as well as for the escort.

The combatant troops (the divisions and corps artillery) were to advance 12 miles (as the crow flies) on August 24th, that is a march of about 14 miles. Considering that each division had a separate road to move on, this entailed no great hardship.

The transport and ammunition columns were also assigned separate roads, the former following the 2nd, the latter the 1st Division. They were to go into cantonments 14 miles in rear of the advance guards of the divisions, 9 miles in rear of the centre and headquarters of the Corps.

I wish to mention another interesting fact about the 23rd August. On that day a detailed and correct "Ordre de bataille" of the French Army of Châlons was published, lithographed I think. How do we get it? Simply from the examination of prisoners captured at Weissenburg and Woerth, and from a compilation and laborious comparison of all the details gathered during our advance from newspapers, orders, and letters that had been picked up. Special officers were entrusted with this work at the various headquarters.

I cannot leave the discussion of the events of the 23rd August without mentioning the *coup de main* against Toul referred to above. The farther the German Armies advanced into the interior of France, the more important became Toul, because it closed the only railway available for the transport of supplies from Germany (after the portion from Herny to Pont-à-Mousson past Metz had been repaired). For that reason a second attempt was made on the 23rd August to take this fortress by means of a *coup de main*, although the attempt of the 16th August had failed. Reconnaissances made since had raised the hope that a determined bombardment by field guns would bring about the surrender of the place; moreover, the garrison was reported to consist exclusively of Gardes Mobile. Two Bavarian batteries and the Corps Artillery of the VI. Corps bombarded the fortress from 8.45 a.m. until 6.30 p.m., with a pause of four hours caused by unsuccessful negotiations. It then became plain that the place could not be taken, and on the next morning the troops followed their corps.

There were many such undertakings during the war of attempting to take small fortresses by a *coup de main* made by field troops alone. On the very next day a similar attempt was made against Verdun. The only one of all the *coups de main* that succeeded was the one undertaken early in 1871 against Rocroy, a fortress that had less strategical importance for us than any other. I myself

was charged with a similar enterprise against Montmédy on the 5th September. I had 65 field guns at my disposal, which I placed in a semicircle round the fortress. In a brief space of time our artillery had almost completely silenced the artillery fire of the garrison, whose positions on the ramparts of this small fortress were everywhere taken in rear by the attacking artillery posted on the opposite side. Under cover of the fire of part of the guns which remained stationary, I advanced the batteries in echelon nearer to the fortress, until several were within 1100 yards of it. We were firing point-blank at that short range. Nothing could be seen in the fortress. We had reached the edge of a plateau surrounding an almost circular valley. In this valley rose a rocky cone, apparently of volcanic origin, on which the fortress, built of solid walls, was situated, not unlike a nest in the rocks. Our shells burst ineffectually against these walls and rocks. It was plain to me that it would have been a butchery, useless as well as cruel, to order the infantry to cross 1000 yards in the open valley for the purpose of assailing a fortress still safe against an escalade. The defenders had only to wait quietly behind their loopholes until our infantry had approached close enough to mask the fire of our artillery, when they could shoot our men down with perfect impunity. Until the walls and ramparts had been breached by siege artillery the fortress could not be entered unless some one opened the gates from within. I therefore summoned the commandant to surrender, in case he had been awed by the bombardment. He did not even answer during the time fixed. The repair under my very eyes of the damage inflicted was sufficient answer. At the expiration of the time allowed I reopened fire. When all the dwelling-houses in the fort were in flames and still no white flag waved from the cathedral tower, I stopped the firing as it was not intended that the troops should lose a day's march. As I had recognized

the futility of the attempt¹ I was glad not to have suffered a greater loss than one gunner and a couple of horses. The infantry and cavalry suffered no losses.

You may perhaps think that the attempt did us no harm since its failure cost so little. The loss before Toul on the 23rd August was also very small, amounting to 2 men killed and 6 wounded. The attempt on Verdun on August 24th cost us 1 officer, 19 men, and 5 horses. You may feel inclined to think it worth while to make such small sacrifices when the capture of a fortress may be possible, and that all the losses incurred in the *coups de main* attempted during the war are fully compensated for by the capture of Rocroy, however little value the latter had for us.

I have not mentioned one loss we suffered. I mean the artillery ammunition. On the 5th September I wasted 3000 shells against the walls of Montmédy. I regretted this expenditure deeply because having just fought a decisive battle, we were compelled to empty our last ammunition columns and to march into the interior of France in the direction of Paris with so much the less ammunition. I could not help feeling disquieted lest I should miss these 3000 shells at the decisive moment of a battle, and that the deficiency might cost us the battle. My superior officer who ordered the attempt, was of the same opinion afterward, and told me that he regretted the expenditure of such valuable ammunition. That no evil consequences resulted, is entirely due to the fact that we were not called upon to give battle until the ammunition had been replenished from Saarlouis. I do not know how much ammunition was expended in the other *coups* attempted during the war, but I believe that I am not far

¹ Later on I read a letter from Montmédy in a Belgian newspaper stating that the place would have been unable to hold out if I had kept up the fire only half an hour longer. I think the French put that in the papers as an after-thought to annoy us, for I saw no reason why the place should capitulate. The whole garrison was safe in the bomb-proofs.

from the truth in stating that we probably used as many shells as in the battle of Sedan. You will surely not compare the capture of Rocroy to the victory of Sedan?

I am therefore of the opinion that the experience of 1870 has taught us that unless there are indications of the commandant or garrison being easily imposed upon, it is better not to attempt a *coup de main* against an armed fortress safe against an escalade with field troops and field artillery. The matter would be quite different if some invention should enable field artillery to destroy walls and ramparts, or render heavy siege guns so mobile that they could accompany field troops on the march and take part in such *coups de main*.

I see you smiling at the thought that at last I am finding fault with the measures of the German commanders, which hitherto I have invariably declared to be models. I can assure you, however, that what I have stated throws no blame on these measures; for every man in our army believed these attempts practicable until they had failed. Some reconnoitring cavalry had reported that they would pledge themselves to take Montmédy with their carbines. It only remains for me to state what lessons for the future we may draw from the numerous enterprises of this character.

There is one conclusion which we may draw from the foregoing as to the strategic value of such small fortresses, and for that reason I have dwelt so long on this point, which appears to be a digression from strategy.

These small fortresses, feebly garrisoned, of little outward effect, which merely serve to block communication (railways and high-roads) can hold out against field troops only, i.e. until the assailant brings sufficient siege artillery into play. If these places can be turned (even by railway) they are of no use at all; for the few troops necessary to observe and render them harmless, are easily compensated for by the cost of their construction, preservation and garrisons; it would be far better to apply

the money towards increasing the numbers and efficiency of the field army. Our offensive operations were not delayed even a single day by all the small French fortresses which we took later in the war.

It is true the great successes which we gained at the very beginning, gave us such a superiority in the field that we could afford to invest, or, at any rate, mask many such fortresses simultaneously and leave them behind us. But we cannot always expect to do this. If in 1870 our superiority in the field had not increased so rapidly, it is conceivable that Toul might have exercised a decisive influence on the strategical measures of our field armies by blocking the railway communications and supplies. Small fortresses, therefore, are useful when they absolutely block the principal communications. Railways alone are here concerned, for field troops will invariably find roads in the vicinity of the main roads, on which they can move.

But such fortresses, even when blocking railways, are only of value when it is certain that the situation will change before the assailant can bring his siege artillery fully into action. These places may be built in accordance with the most modern ideas and inventions in fortification, yet experience shows that artillery will immediately invent something which will destroy the latest means of defence, just as it shatters the heaviest armour plates. Since the building of fortresses requires a space of time measured by years, the artillery will always keep in advance of fortification, because a gun is more quickly invented and constructed than a fortress. Such small places, therefore, have never much strategical value beyond that of being a place characterized by the engineer by the term *place du moment*. Before proceeding to their construction it must be calculated how long it will take the assailant to bring up sufficient siege artillery to the attack, and whether this space of time, be it long or short, will exert a decisive influence on the course of the war.

If these questions are answered in the negative, it is better not to build such small fortresses, and, if they already exist, to level them and save the money required for their preservation.

I am not speaking here of great fortresses, which, when provided with a sufficient and active garrison, have a considerable influence owing to their offensive power over a wide zone. Different considerations have to be taken into account when dealing with them. Metz detained one half of our field Army for two months and a half. The fortress of Paris practically represented the whole of France. Plevna delayed the Russian forces even longer than Metz the Germans. The history of the war of 1877 is not sufficiently known to say with any certainty, but I believe that it was possible after the second unsuccessful assault of the Russians on Plevna, for Osman Pasha by a vigorous offensive to have destroyed the bridges over the Danube and to have driven the whole Russian army in Bulgaria to destruction.

I gave you some of my ideas on the value of fortresses whilst discussing the manner in which Bazaine allowed himself to be tied down to Metz. We saw there that even a large fortress is a two-edged sword which may harm him who wields it. For if Metz had not been a fortress, Bazaine would merely have retired toward Châlons, whence both armies would have been able to retreat to Paris if obliged. The world would not have witnessed the capitulation of two whole armies at Sedan and Metz. Though it would be wrong to conclude that fortresses are useless because they were improperly used, yet you must admit that the fact of Metz and Sedan being fortresses induced the leaders to allow themselves to be shut up in them. MacMahon would certainly never have thought of halting north of Sedan on the 31st August if he had not expected to find a *point d'appui* in that place, and, at any rate, protection from the south.

However great the power of a large fortress with detached forts may be when fully armed and garrisoned for defence, however strongly it may support an army which rests one flank on it or assembles in rear of the forts, it may prove ruinous to an army which is induced by the existence of the fortress to allow itself to be shut up in it. This has been amply demonstrated by the events of this war.

TWENTY-FOURTH LETTER.

THE 24TH AUGUST.

AT the conclusion of my last letter I digressed into considerations of strategy in general, and even into far-reaching questions about the defences of a country. Let us return to-day to the details of the campaign we are discussing.

On the 24th August the opposing armies reached the destinations assigned them in the orders issued on the preceding day. The sketch opposite given in the Official Account shows the position of both sides.

The French Army executed the so-called change of direction to the north, i.e. the 5th and 12th Corps with Bonnemain's Cavalry Division were concentrated around Rethel where they received supplies for several days, the 1st Corps advanced 7 miles to Juniville, and the 7th Corps to Contreuve, 5 miles from Vouziers. The army had thus moved 7 to 9 miles to the north-east without effecting a complete change of direction to the north. On the contrary, the left wing of the army had gained rather more ground than the right wing. It is quite inconceivable with our present ideas about the strategical employment of cavalry, that Margueritte's Cavalry Division, which was to cover the right flank, remained quietly at Monthois, and did not so much as send a cavalry regiment through the Argonnes to Grand Pré and another to the south on the west of the Argonnes, although the Marshal knew from reports received that he had to expect the Armies of the Crown Princes of Prussia and

Saxony from these directions. Anything new or at variance with old customs cannot be put into men's heads all at once. Margueritte's Cavalry Division had been sent forward to Monthois on the preceding day for the above purpose. It almost seemed as though early on the second day apprehensions had been felt that the cavalry were isolated and imperilled by their great distance from the infantry, for the cavalry remained halted and allowed the 7th Corps to approach within 5 miles, thus no longer affording the latter sufficient safety or rest. I am unable to say whether this action was due to apprehension or some other cause, or how it originated, because the special army orders and those of the division are not at my disposal. I can therefore only express my conjectures.

You may think that I have criticized the French leaders too severely by using the expression "that anything new could not be put into men's heads all at once," and that I have violated my rule of never laying the blame on individuals. I am not blaming the French at all. All men are like that, and this circumstance alone exonerates the French. Was it not the same case with us? Was our cavalry at the beginning of the war everywhere properly employed? If so, would the Royal Headquarters, which carefully abstained from all unnecessary interference with details, have thought it necessary to enjoin so frequently in written orders, and even in telegrams, to have the cavalry pushed forward far to the front?

You will perhaps notice that the want of provisions reported by the 1st Corps is said to have caused the Marshal to march towards the supplies at Rethel. It was, however, ordered, not to that point, but to Juniville. French officers complained, not only that the supplies of the neighbourhood had all been removed to Rethel, but that most of the inhabitants had gone there to get a glimpse of the Emperor, and that in consequence the French soldiers were compelled to procure what was needful from the

fields, the gardens and houses, in order to escape absolute want. It would almost seem as though the French army had not been instructed in the methods of making requisitions. My personal experience agrees with this view. A few days later the inhabitants of a town lately occupied by the French complained that their own troops had not requisitioned their provisions in the same orderly manner as we did, but had actually pillaged and used force. They felt safer with us, their enemies, than with their own troops.

I feel very much inclined to write to you about requisitions and supplies, but I will spare you this in order not to become tiresome by repetition, for I inflicted that subject on you when writing about the campaign of 1859.

According to the Official Account and the sketch given therein for the 24th August, the following were the destinations reached by the German Armies in accordance with their orders:—

The Headquarters of the Meuse Army was established at Monthairon on the Meuse. The 6th Cavalry Division reached Foncaucourt by a march of more than 19 miles, and pushed its advanced parties to the Ante, 12 miles farther, beyond the Argonnes hills. The Cavalry Division of the Guard advanced to Vaubécourt, 14 miles. The Official Account does not state whether the advanced parties reached the road St. Meneshould-Vitry as ordered. I presume they did, for I do not remember the matter being brought up. Non-compliance with the orders would certainly have caused the gravest censure.

The 5th Cavalry Division and that of the XII. Corps invested Verdun on the west during the attempted *coup de main*, and failed to get farther than Dombasle and Nixéville, west of Verdun, in the afternoon after the action.

The XII. Corps, after its futile attempt on Verdun, reached Dieue, on the left bank of the Meuse; the Guard Corps arrived at the prescribed position in the vicinity of Pierrefitte, the IV. Corps reached Rosnes, its advanced guard Génicourt.

Of the Third Army the cavalry of the II. Bavarian Corps reached the country north of Revigny-aux-Vaches, the Wurttemberg Cavalry Cheminon-la-Ville, the 4th Cavalry Division crossed the Marne at St. Dizier and reached Arzilières with the main body, Châtel Raould, with its advanced guard, whilst a detachment on the right bank of the Marne arrived at Pogny, two miles south-east of Châlons. Major Klocke's two squadrons of Dragoons had ascertained on the preceding day that the town of Châlons was unoccupied by the enemy, and now rode into the Camp, which they found deserted and partly in flames.

In rear of the cavalry the corps in the first line reached the following stations :—

The II. Bavarian Corps, Bar-le-Duc and Laimont,
The V. Corps, Robert-Espagne and Couvonges,
The Wurttemberg Division, Sandrupt,
The XI. Corps, Ancerville and St. Dizier, advance guard, Hallignicourt.

The corps in the second line reached the following stations :—

The I. Bavarian Corps, Tronville *viâ* Ligny,
The VI. Corps, Joinville; the 2nd Cavalry Division,
Vassy and Doulevant, in front of the latter.
The VI. Corps with the 2nd Cavalry Division
thus almost appear to be detached to the
left.

The Headquarters of the Third Army remained at Ligny;

The Royal Headquarters was transferred to Bar-le-Duc in the course of the day.

These marches of the German Armies direct our

attention first of all to the action of the cavalry. That of the Meuse Army extended its line of observation to a distance (as the crow flies) of 24 miles from the headquarters of the army corps. We notice at once that those cavalry divisions which are under the direct orders of the army commander, move more freely and advance farther than those attached to a corps. It was still more so on the 25th August. The Meuse Army had four such divisions, of which two (5th and 6th) were under the direct orders of the army commander, and two (12th and Guard) were attached to their corps. A glimpse at the sketch for the 25th August shows that the first two are well out in front at Vieil, Dampierre and St. Meneshould on the Ante and Aisne, whilst those of the Guard and XII. Corps are 10 miles in rear of them.

I explained on a former occasion how the delay entailed by the transmission of army orders through corps headquarters may render doubtful the receipt of the order by the cavalry divisions in time to admit of their complete execution. On the 24th August a personal experience, trifling in itself, confirmed the view I hold. On that day one of my aides-de-camp had been sent by the corps commander to the headquarters of the Meuse Army to receive the orders; he returned at 10 p.m. The orders were issued at 11.15 p.m. at corps headquarters. Considering that the corps commander has to study the disposition received from army headquarters with the aid of a map, that he has to discuss and consider the measures to be taken in accordance therewith with his chief staff officer, that the disposition is then dictated to the staff officers, and read over aloud to check it, you will admit that the 1½ hours devoted to this work are not too long a time. Moreover it remains questionable whether, if the advanced troops of the cavalry, perhaps 25 miles in front, receive their orders thus, they can move off at daybreak, since a similar delay will be encountered at the headquarters of the division at Vaubé-

court and at the brigade headquarters at Belval or Triaucourt. Moreover the staff officers have to ride during the night, when travel is invariably slower than in broad daylight. To the delay at corps headquarters must be added the roundabout road the carriers of the order would have to traverse to reach the cavalry, and which in the present case, from Petit Monthairon to Vaubécourt, may be estimated at about 5 miles.

The same frictions and evils are bound to result when the cavalry divisions are permanently united in a cavalry corps; just imagine the four cavalry divisions of the Meuse Army formed into one cavalry corps. If the headquarters of this corps had been required to be equally distant from all the divisions, it would have been established at Passavant on the 25th August. The delays in the transmission of orders to the divisions would have been even more marked than when the cavalry divisions were attached to an army corps.

This difference becomes still sharper if in the Third Army we assume the advanced cavalry of the I. Bavarian Corps, of the Wurtemberg Division, and the 2nd and 4th Cavalry Divisions formed into a cavalry corps. It is not clear how the commander of this corps could have directed his troops to good purpose on the 25th August, when they had to be extended from St. Martin to Châlons by way of Pogny, Vitry, to Chavanges, on a front of 34 miles.

The mere existence of a cavalry corps is a leaden weight which paralyzes the reconnaissance of cavalry. Napoleon I. formed such a body under Murat in 1806. But he was compelled from the beginning to dismember and distribute it in front of the several columns which marched on three parallel roads. You will perhaps propose that the commanding general of the cavalry corps should invariably remain at army headquarters, whence he might issue orders to his divisions as quickly as the army commander could. In that case the command of

the cavalry corps would be degraded to a section of the army command which could just as well be managed by an officer of the general staff, and the orders would still be uselessly delayed at the headquarters of the cavalry corps before being sent on to the divisions.

I remember the joy of the officers of the regiments assigned to the cavalry corps in 1866. The very idea of a cavalry corps of 8,000 to 10,000 sabres is poetical. The aspect must be imposing when you are on the windward side of it and not covered by the clouds of dust thrown up. But one soon becomes sensible of the sober reality when kept waiting for orders for hours, making fatiguing marches in such a mass, and receiving belated orders the execution of which should be completed by the time they arrive. Moreover cases will happen when splendid opportunities for gathering laurels with ease are allowed to slip by on account of the difficulty of transmitting orders. The individual members of such a corps become discouraged, and blame the corps commander or his chief staff officer for the unwieldiness which is due to the very formation of the corps.

These are the reasons why we have not formed large cavalry corps since 1866, and why we have preferred to form independent cavalry divisions, which receive their orders direct from army headquarters. In the rare event of a battle offering an opportunity to assail the same objective with more than one cavalry division, the army commander may combine several cavalry divisions under the orders of the senior divisional commander.

I hear you ask ironically whether the organization of cavalry corps is a branch of strategy, since we agreed to discuss strategy merely. It is true not all questions of organization pertain to strategy. Whether a battalion or squadron should be divided into 4, 6 or 8 companies or troops respectively, whether a battery should consist of 6 or 8 guns, are purely questions of elementary tactics. It is different with larger units, whose organization directly

affects the manner of deploying the masses for battle. Even Blume, who treats strategy in such an abstract manner, discusses the question of how to combine army corps and cavalry divisions into armies. If you desire a purely scientific definition, it might perhaps be stated that those matters of organization which influence the direct leading of troops in battle, are tactical, and that only those are strategical which affect the manner of moving the masses to the battle-field. To express it more correctly, questions of organization affecting units higher than the brigade may be considered as strategical, those affecting lower units as tactical. I will admit however that there may be questions of organization which may be both strategical *and* tactical. Enough of this pedantry. My opinion is that the question of organization which exercises such dominating influence on the reconnaissance of cavalry which in its turn is of material assistance to strategy, is certainly a question which should be discussed in connection with strategy.

I still have to mention a special feat of the cavalry on the 24th August. I refer to the bold ride of Major Klocke's two dragoon squadrons, $\frac{1}{2}$ squadron of which traversed the Camp of Châlons to the Mourmelon. It is situated, like the "Pavillon de L'Empereur," more than 14 miles north of the town of Châlons. They were thus more than 25 miles in front of the nearest cavalry, the flanking detachment of the 4th Cavalry Division at Pogny, and 38 miles in front of the ground held by the advanced cavalry of the army, and about 47 miles in front of the foremost infantry advance guards. The essential service rendered to the Supreme Command by these two squadrons in ascertaining on the 24th August the evacuation of the Camp by the French Army, may have been one of the reasons why General von Verdy in his "Studies in Troop Leading (Part II., The Cavalry Division acting with the Army)" lays down the principle, that, when reconnoitring, a cavalry division should invariably send forward such

detachments, consisting of one or two squadrons, far beyond its outposts. If you imagine the cavalry of the Meuse Army acting thus, it is possible that two such squadrons might have advanced to Monthois or Semide on the 24th August and have thus located the enemy. The Supreme Commander of the German Army would have become convinced during the night of the 24th August, that MacMahon was moving north-eastward to turn the right flank of the German Armies, and counter-measures could have been taken 24 hours earlier than was actually the case. Much exhaustion would have been spared the troops on the march, and the number of our combatants would not have been diminished for some time to come by thousands of exhausted men.

Such a ride into the enemy's country requires considerable circumspection, skill, dash and determination. The leader must know how to traverse great distances daily without exhausting his men. For when and wherever he may meet the enemy, though it be at the termination of a forced march, his horses must be fresh enough to enable him either to fight or disappear quickly before an overwhelming enemy. He cannot count on support since the nearest troops are as much as two marches in rear. No body of cavalry can undertake such reconnaissances for long, however much the horses may be spared. A small force can never have complete rest. It must be ready day and night to mount quickly. During the short periods devoted to rest it has to guard itself in every direction, not only in front but to the right, left and rear. Particularly when the inhabitants show a hostile disposition, a considerable fraction of the whole is thus prevented from resting. If therefore necessity exists for pushing such isolated squadrons far to the front for any length of time, they should be relieved after a few days, otherwise they will be ruined.

The emergency cannot last long, for the stage in which the opponents are 50 or 70 miles from each other, is of

brief duration. They are seeking each other in order to give battle, and thus come into touch with each other. When the opposing armies come into contact, when the patrols meet, when the vedettes see each other or the infantry outposts fire at each other, the sending of whole squadrons to the front will come to an end. Nor does Verdy think it is then necessary. Such an enterprise will then be limited to a movement round one of the flanks of the hostile army when an opportunity is offered.

The feat of Major Klocke's squadrons certainly exercised considerable strategical influence. The hour at which the report arrived at the Royal Headquarters at Bar-le-Duc, is unfortunately not mentioned in the Official Account. Judging by the distance we may assume that it arrived in the course of the night of the 24th, provided relays were furnished by the detachments at Pogny and by the Cavalry Division. It certainly contributed to the decisions formed on the 25th August and helped to clear up the situation. We shall recognize this when we discuss the events of the 25th August.

I must now invite your attention to the decisions which were formed by the German Supreme Command in the course of the 24th August for the next few days. Information had reached the Royal Headquarters at Commercy on the 23rd August that the Emperor Napoleon was at Reims with a large portion of the French forces. The source of information is not stated in the Official Account. So far as I know, the information was received from French newspapers and telegraphed to the Royal Headquarters from London.

Moreover the investing Army before Metz had sent to the Royal Headquarters the intercepted letter of a French officer in which he expressed confidence in an early relief by the Army of Châlons. Even private letters may expose the most important matters by apparently innocent statements. Formerly we also had had unpleasant experiences of this kind. For that reason the Prince of

Wurttemberg issued an order to the Guard Corps forbidding during the war any statement having reference to the army to be sent by letter, on penalty of trial by court martial, even though such statements should be strictly private and solely intended for relations or friends.

No particular importance was at first attached to that letter at the Royal Headquarters. There was an inclination to believe that the enemy would do what promised the best result, i.e. cover Paris, and the movement of the French Army to Reims was explained as a preparatory measure to covering the capital by a flank position, perhaps at Laon. While the Royal Headquarters were moving from Commercy to Bar-le-Duc on the 24th, the commander of the Third Army was met on the road, and here for the first time the idea was advanced that political circumstances might compel the enemy to take the fatal step of marching round the German right along the Belgian frontier, in order to effect a junction with Marshal Bazaine. The idea still prevailed, however, that the enemy would do what was most profitable to him. This was correct; for should the enemy undertake anything unprofitable, so much the better for us. There was no reason, therefore, for making any changes in the general instructions issued, and the Meuse Army was simply informed of the intelligence received.

This Army received the communication on the afternoon of the 24th August and ordered the 5th Cavalry Division to send a regiment on the next day north to Dun to destroy the railway west of Montmédy and render it useless for the enemy. There was some prospect by this means of hearing about any preparation which might point to a movement of the French Army along the Belgian frontier.

Matters stood thus when in the afternoon the commander of the Third Army received a Paris newspaper from the 4th Cavalry Division which confirmed the

information received in the morning, that MacMahon was at Reims with 150,000 men. Reims was further away from the Third Army than Châlons. The commander of the Third Army decided therefore on his own responsibility to move on the 25th August into the position ordered for the 26th, the line St. Mard-sur-le-Mont—Vitry-le-Français. The Army would thus be placed in echelon one day's march in advance of the Meuse Army. The enemy, however, by marching northward, had moved away from the Third, more than from the latter. Hence the decision of the former harmonized with the intention of attacking the enemy simultaneously, if possible, with united forces. Orders for the purpose were issued on the 24th August. The necessary marches would not require superhuman efforts; they would barely exceed 14 miles, which, being uninterrupted by the enemy and made on many parallel roads, could easily be made in one day.

You may perhaps find fault with the Supreme Command for not taking measures at once against a turning movement by the north after receiving the letter from the French officer in Metz and his anticipation of early relief by MacMahon. But the anticipation of a single officer does not establish a fact. It is impossible to base the movements of armies on it without danger of finding a day or even a few hours later, another letter containing contrary statements, in which case new changes for the whole army would have to be made, like Gyulai, who on the 9th May, 1859, changed his views of the situation four times and succeeded in exhausting his whole army through counter-orders so as to incapacitate it for battle, without having seen the enemy. We see that on the 24th August the Supreme Command of the German Army was very much in doubt as to the enemy's intentions. That is no cause for criticism. In the first place the army was still 24 miles from the opponent and in the midst of a hostile population. The information gathered

is in such cases very meagre, and great prudence must be exercised in making deductions. The only reliable information during the operations was collected by our own troops. But the latter had not yet come in contact with the enemy, and Klocke's dragoons alone had ascertained the fact that the hostile Army had evacuated the Camp of Châlons and marched away in the direction of Reims. This fact permitted the Third Army to advance further than originally contemplated for the 25th August. The other news merely invited the northward movement because it was now more probable to be right.

The orders issued on the 24th August furnish us with instances of independent decisions on the part of the army commanders. The Meuse Army ordered the 5th Cavalry Division to send a regiment to the north, through Dun, for the purpose of destroying the railway west of Montmédy, the Third Army decided to reach on the 25th the positions assigned for the 26th August. Had these two commands waited for orders or applied for permission to act, it might have been too late. The practice observed by the Supreme Command of communicating merely its general intentions and objects to the army commanders and of abstaining from interference with details, had prompted the leaders to independent action. They adopted without hesitation those measures which in view of the changed conditions they knew to be in accordance with the ultimate object of their superior.

There is, I admit, much to justify the question you are asking, whether it was right for the Third Army to advance in this independent manner so far to the front on the 25th August. In the first place the Third Army was empowered to do so by the wording of the orders issued from the Royal Headquarters on the 21st August, that it should so arrange its march as to be on the line St. Mard-sur-le-Mont—Vitry-le-Français on the 26th August. Whatever was to be done to this end from the 23rd to the 26th August, was left to the discretion of

the Third Army. The letter of the order would be complied with if the latter moved up to that line on the 25th, and rested there on the 26th August, provided no other action should meanwhile be required of it. The obedience required of an army commander should not be a literal one, but one meeting the intentions of the Supreme Command. Now it was intended that the Third Army should advance approximately in line with the Meuse Army, or not more than half a march in advance of it. That intention however was not binding so long as the French Army was so distant that the Third Army could not be attacked singly during that one march. Therefore the latter, acting fully in accordance with the intentions underlying the orders of the 21st August, was justified in forming the decision in question. Moreover the Supreme Command might have prohibited the measure in good time if it thought it was desirable, since it was reported during the night of the 24th August.

The doubtful data on which the Supreme Command had to base its decisions, may be judged by its lack of knowledge about the enemy on the 24th August and by the want of frequent and reliable reports due to the remoteness of the enemy, which also precluded personal observation, yet the decisions were necessarily far-reaching, and for that reason were the more likely to be affected. To choose under such circumstances what is correct, requires rare discernment and still rarer strength of character. You might perhaps say that the Supreme Command did not interfere on the 24th August, but permitted the orders issued on the 21st for the 23rd to 26th August to remain in force, which orders were moreover obeyed by the Third Army, with this modification that it reached on the 25th the line prescribed for the 26th August. Still in not making any change the Supreme Command really ordered a continuance of the advance. Does that strike you as so very simple? Let us suppose a timid, or even a very

cautious leader in the place of the Commander-in-Chief. He would certainly have ordered the two armies to halt on the 25th August and reconnoitre until actual observation had furnished definite news of the enemy. At any rate, any leader responsible to a sovereign who had remained at home, would have acted thus. For in view of the existence of the powerful hostile army shut up in Metz in rear of the field army, such a decision would have seemed very natural in order not to move too far from the investing force, so that the two might remain in constant mutual support. The existence of both armies, the future of the throne and country, were at stake.

Just imagine the consequences if on the 25th the German Armies had remained in their positions of the 24th August. In that case it would hardly have been possible for the V. and XI. Corps to have cut off the retreat of the French Army at Sedan. That successful issue was essentially facilitated by the spontaneous decision of the Third Army to make a double march on the 25th August.

You may perceive from this, how important it is in the most critical moments that the chief command should rest in the hands of the sovereign, who can best, nay I may say, who alone, can weigh when and where to stake the existence of his throne. We have discussed on a former occasion how the timely formation of a decision is hampered by a sovereign who, though present with the army, does not command it. We see here the power that lies in the fact of his wielding the supreme command. For the superiority of the German Armies over the French was to a considerable extent due to the fact that the sovereign's presence made itself felt. The events of the 25th August will make this still plainer.

Let me now return to the details of the strategical events of the 24th August, more particularly as regards

the Guard Corps and to the orders issued to its several parts.

Thanks to the pleasantly cool weather and judicious arrangements which precluded any check, the march on the 24th August was again a mere promenade. Being screened by our cavalry 25 miles in advance, we might have believed ourselves in the midst of peace. Thus it was possible for the corps commander to allow me to leave headquarters during the march in order to arrange in person several matters regarding the Corps Artillery, which otherwise would have required a lengthy correspondence. Officers could precede the troops by several hours to arrange the billeting, and the troops were able to rest on their arrival. The inhabitants received them willingly, whether from fear or sympathy was a matter of indifference to us; although we all were firmly convinced that the former was the cause. I was quartered on a priest, who entered in conversation with me about my branch of the service and amused me very much by his ideas on strategy. His question whether we were marching on Châlons, was accompanied by such a cunning look, that I could not help suspecting that he had means of communicating with the French Army. I answered him that I believed we were on the nearest road from St. Mihiel to Châlons. "Et de Châlons," he asked, "vous prendrez le chemin de fer pour aller à Paris?" I looked at him in astonishment. But the brigade-adjudant answered in the most serious manner that we were afraid that the railway officials had run away and that we should find no one at the booking-office to sell us tickets. "Ah oui," said the clerical gentleman, "il pourrait y avoir des difficultés." This remark allayed my fears regarding his dangerous character, even if he were really a spy.

The march disposition issued by the commander of the Guard Corps for the 25th August informed the troops in the first place that the attempt on Verdun had failed and

that one brigade of the XII. Corps had remained to mask the place ; next, that on the 25th the headquarters of the Army would be transferred to Fleury, of the IV. Corps to Laheyecourt, of the XII. Corps to Jubécourt, of the Guard Corps to Triaucourt, and that the 5th Cavalry Division would advance to St. Menehould, the 6th to Vieil Dampierre. It was next ordered that headquarters and main body of the Cavalry Division of the Guard should move to Le Chemin, one brigade to Passavant, and another to Villers-en-Argonne. In front of the cavalry of the Guard the 5th and 6th Cavalry Divisions had established communication with each other. The former therefore had nothing to do beyond convincing itself that the front was secured.

The 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard was to march off at 6 a.m. through Rignaucourt, Beuzée, Evre-en-Argonne to Foucaucourt (headquarters), head of the column to Brizeaux, rear to Beuzée, and to detach one battalion to Fleury to protect the Army Headquarters.

The 1st Infantry Division of the Guard to march at 6 a.m. *vid* Vaubécourt and Triaucourt, head of column to reach Esclaires, rear Vaubécourt, headquarters to Senard, one battalion to Triaucourt.

The Corps Artillery to march at 8 a.m. to L'Isle-en-Barrois (headquarters) and Rembre-court.

Ammunition columns to march at 8 a.m. to Erize la Petite, heavy baggage to Chaumont-sur-Aire, starting at 8 a.m.

You will note that the orders from the Corps Headquarters begin with the announcement of a failure. But if it was necessary to announce to the troops that an attack would be made on Verdun, it now became necessary to inform them that the fortress was not in our possession, in order to prevent any one from marching there unsuspectingly. Yet the very thing happened a few days later. I do not know whether in the corps concerned the same announcement had not been made or whether

the leader overlooked the information. I only know that a few days later I found at Montfaucon some empty wagons of a provision column whose leader asked me the road to Verdun. I told him that on the previous evening Verdun was still in the enemy's hands. He asserted so confidently that he knew Verdun had capitulated, that I was puzzled and remarked that in that case the fortress must have surrendered during the night. He marched to Verdun. The French were very polite to him, allowed him to enter without any bother, and closed the gate behind him. After the capitulation of Verdun several months later this officer reappeared. The poor fellow did not even receive sympathy for his misfortune.

I have already mentioned that on the 25th August the Cavalry Division of the Guard found itself in rear of the screen formed by the 5th and 6th Cavalry Divisions. Both Infantry Divisions of the Guard were scattered in cantonments which extended to a depth of 9 miles. It was perfectly safe to allow this extension, and therefore greater comfort in the cantonments, because the cavalry was so far to the front, that the Infantry Divisions could not be attacked on the 25th August. Note what influence the strategical arrangements have on the efficiency of troops for battle. The French corps making short marches (9 miles) were exhausted and decimated by the denseness of their formation, by waiting before they moved off and after they arrived, and by bivouacking by corps in all kinds of weather; the German troops took pleasant walks, lived as comfortably as in peace, and yet advanced 14 miles each day.

TWENTY-FIFTH LETTER.

THE 25TH AUGUST.

THE movements of the parts of the German Army, on the 25th of August, corresponded to the orders of the previous day, which we have seen.

In order to define the situation I will give the destinations reached according to the Official Account :—

The Headquarters of the Meuse Army Fleury.

XII. Corps at Dombasle.

Guard Corps at Triaucourt.

IV. Corps at Laheycourt.

5th Cavalry Division at St. Menehould.

6th Cavalry Division at Vieil Dampierre.

12th Cavalry Division at Clermont (detachment at Varennes).

Cavalry Division of the Guard at Le Chemin.

The Headquarters of the Third Army Ligny-en-Barrois.

II. Bavarian Corps at Charmont.

V. Corps at Heiltz le Maurupt and Heiltz l'Evêque.

XI. Corps at Perthes and Faremont.

Wurttemberg Division at Sermaize.

I. Bavarian Corps at Bar-le-Duc.

VI. Corps at Vassy.

Wurttemberg Cavalry at Courtisols east of Châlons.

Bavarian Uhlan Brigade at La Frêne.

4th Cavalry Division at La Chaussée and Pogny.

Two squadrons under Major Klocke at St. Leonhardt immediately east of Reims.

2nd Cavalry Division at Chavanges.

The Royal Headquarters remained at Bar-le-Duc.

To begin again with the work of the cavalry. The 17th (Brunswick) Hussars, which had been sent to the north early in the morning according to orders from the headquarters of the Meuse Army, reached Mouzay to the south of Montmédy and burned the wooden railway bridge at Lamouilly west of Montmédy during the night. The men engaged in this work had reached a point, nearly 33 miles, as the crow flies, from their starting point, and, if we add the patrolling necessary in an unknown country and the curves of the road, the distance will be probably increased by 6 miles. You see that I did not demand too much in my Letters on Cavalry when I said that they should learn how to traverse great distances without injury to their horses.

In the afternoon the 6th Cavalry Division chased and captured a Garde Mobile battalion which had been discovered by a squadron of the advance guard. The successful charges of the various regiments and squadrons prove that the times of successful action by cavalry against infantry have not yet passed away, provided that the infantry has been shaken by some means or another. It must be admitted that this battalion was by no means efficient, for the men had not even drawn their uniforms and were on the march from Vitry to St. Menehould to draw them there, and then to proceed by rail to Paris. About 1000 men were thus captured. On the march they attempted to escape from their escort, but they were overpowered with the aid of the Dragoons and Rifles of the Guard, and escorted on the same day to Triaucourt.

After the capture of this battalion the Division extended its reconnaissance to the Yèvre brook in line with the 5th Cavalry Division, i.e. 24 miles in advance of the XII.

Corps and 14 miles in advance of the Guard and IV. Corps.¹

The small fortress of Vitry, which was almost unarmed and garrisoned only by Mobiles, surrendered to the 4th Cavalry Division on being summoned. The two squadrons of Major Klocke preserved their distance of 43 miles in advance of the leading infantry advance guards of the Third Army. I have frequently pointed out the importance of this active reconnaissance by the cavalry.

In the meantime the French Army had made a slight movement to the east and that only with a part of the force. One whole army corps (12th) and a cavalry division (2nd) remained at Reithel because the supplies had not yet been fully regulated. The Headquarters remained at the same place. The 1st Corps marched from Juniville to Attigny (10 miles) where it found provisions, the 7th from Contreuve to Vouziers (5 miles) where the supplies were barely sufficient, the 5th Corps filled up its supply columns and marched to Amagne (5 miles), Bonnemain's Cavalry Division moved north to Le Chesne (9 miles). On reading the reasons why the French Army advanced so slowly, and comparing this hesitation with the rapid marches of the German armies, we may say, that the German Army arranged its supplies according to the marches and that the French Army arranged its marches according to the supplies. A comparison of what was accomplished by both armies on the 25th August, 1870, shows most plainly what potent influence supplies exercise over strategy. I have discussed when describing the campaign of 1859 the various methods of subsisting an army so far as the matter concerns strategy. Still I cannot refrain from repeating

¹ A description of this affair is given in the Official Account, vol. ii. p. 200.—ED.

here that it seems to me as though the Marshal's aversion toward the whole eastward movement may have added materially to the delay with which it was carried out. Remarks from a French-Belgian source to the effect that nothing was known at this time at Montmédy about the approach of the French Army (Bazaine), leads us to surmise, that MacMahon was waiting for news of a successful eruption of Bazaine, before committing himself to an energetically executed march for the purpose of joining him.

On the 25th August the French Army again began to cover its advance by a screen of cavalry, and it almost seems as if it wished to adopt something from the German method of warfare, for the corps (7th) on the right flank sent a cavalry regiment from Vouziers to Grand Pré (almost 9 miles) in the direction of the enemy, and Margueritte's Cavalry Division was thrown out 9 miles in advance of the front of the Army in the direction of the latter's march.

It also seems as though there was as yet no clear idea about the duties of cavalry with respect to reconnaissance and screening. For the direction given to the cavalry gives the impression of a mechanically executed scheme. I find it hard to say this of such an experienced commander as MacMahon; but even if I overlook the fact that Bonnemain's Cavalry Division was left at Rethel, because it had to be provided with supplies there, I fail to understand why Margueritte's Cavalry Division marched from Vouziers to Le Chesne. The sole purpose seems to be that it might be in front of the centre of the army. There was no use for cavalry at that place, for the Marshal knew that the Crown Prince of Saxony was approaching from the direction of Verdun and the Crown Prince of Prussia from a more southerly direction (Vitry); cavalry cannot reconnoitre the enemy if it be not sent towards him, or if it be thrown out in front of the army without regard to the enemy. I also stated that this

Cavalry Division should have reconnoitred the mountain passes. Such a reconnaissance could refer only to the nature of the ground and the roads, for which purpose a few officers would have sufficed; for it might have been calculated that no enemy could be expected there for some days.

The distance, 9 miles, to which the cavalry was advanced, is rather small and does not guarantee complete security and rest to the army in rear. Until prevented by the enemy, cavalry should certainly occupy the country a day's march in front of the army, if the latter's rest is to be undisturbed, which is not possible, unless it is certain that it will not be attacked within the next 24 hours and—which is the same thing—unless the enemy is reported by the cavalry when he is still at least a day's march distant. Imagine that the German Armies had operated in the same manner as the French, sending their cavalry screen only 9 miles to the front and flank and the army corps bivouacking in dense masses, then look at the sketch given in the Official Account which shows the positions of the opposing armies on the 25th of August. The German Armies would then have continued their march to the west, the French Army to the east, and they would have passed each other with their flanks two marches apart, and neither would have noticed the other. The same thing would then have happened in war which I have frequently witnessed at manœuvres, "that neither found the other," and which in the manœuvres gives rise to much ridicule and censure. We cannot calculate what the consequences might have been in this case; for it would have depended on accident when one would have heard of the other. As regards information, the French, being in their own country, would possibly have had the advantage.

It is highly interesting to read in the Official Account the reports received during the 25th August by the Royal Headquarters of the German Army, and on which the

new movements were based. The measures adopted by the German Armies on this and the succeeding day are probably the most decisive of the whole campaign from the 23rd of August to the 1st of September, because they laid the foundation for the great event of Sedan.¹

No definite reports of MacMahon's movement to Reims had arrived at Royal Headquarters until the evening of the 24th August, though newspapers and reports of spies not absolutely reliable made mention of the movement. Whether it was actually begun or not, the assumption that the enemy would do what was most profitable for him, justified the supposition that he would cover Paris by means of a flank position at Reims or at Laon. The only indication that the French Army was contemplating the dangerous and hopeless march along the Belgian frontier, was contained in the letter intercepted near Metz. The Royal Headquarters could and would not give credence to such favourable news, still less base on it the movements of the armies, before the news was confirmed by reliable reports. It therefore considered for the moment the possibility of the enemy's movement to Reims being for the purpose of covering Paris by a flank position. Still, measures were at the same time taken in case the enemy retired on Paris. In both cases the continuation of the present advance seemed most appropriate. If the enemy retired directly on Paris, it would only be necessary to follow and overtake him and then to pursue or beat him. But if the enemy had taken up a position on our flank after moving to Reims, the Meuse Army would encounter and hold him, while the Third Army turned his position from the south, thus carrying out the long contemplated plan of forcing him to the north away from Paris.

It was therefore decided to continue for the present to

¹ The full details of these reports are given in vol. ii. part i. of the *Official Account*, p. 202, et seq. See also Appendix xxxiv. in the same volume.—ED.

advance in the direction hitherto pursued, as long as the reports of our own cavalry did not indicate a material change of the situation. The orders issued covered the period to the 26th of August inclusive. For the two succeeding days (27th and 28th) an order was prepared in Bar-le-Duc on the evening of the 24th August which was to bring the troops to the line Suippe-Châlons-Coole. Please mark that this order was not yet issued to the army commanders. The Royal Headquarters was aware that the armies were now too close upon the enemy to admit of dispositions being laid down for the next four days. It was recognized that if the ultimate object was to be kept steadily in view, action could not be taken except as each emergency arose. The Royal Headquarters did not wish to burden the subordinate leaders with far-reaching instructions, which might have to be modified or suspended, and it wanted to avoid counter-orders with the consequent confusion by keeping this order back until the last moment. I need only remind you of Gyulai's lengthy dispositions which laid down all kinds of details sometimes for eight days in advance, which could not subsequently be carried out; you can draw your own inferences from this comparison.

The Official Account informs us that up to 11 p.m. on the 24th of August the Royal Headquarters received reports from the 4th Cavalry Division, that the French had left Châlons, and also the newspaper which stated that MacMahon had actually taken up a position with his army near Reims, and last of all a telegram from Paris dated the 23rd August *via* London to the effect: "MacMahon's army assembled at Reims. Emperor Napoleon and Prince with army. MacMahon seeking junction with Bazaine." The Official Account adds, "The last sentence of the despatch confirmed the startling hint in the letter from Metz to which little credibility had been attached." Still the Royal Headquarters delayed until 11 a.m. on the 25th August, before chang-

ing the direction of march ordered for the 26th August. At that hour it was high time to form a decision if, having regard to the distances of the several headquarters, the dispositions were to reach the troops in time.¹

In the meantime—the Official Account, as already remarked, does not expressly state this—the report of Major Klocke must have reached the Royal Headquarters. He had traversed the Camp of Châlons as far as the Mourmelon on the preceding afternoon, and probably ascertained there, that the hostile army had marched away to Reims on the 22nd.

The reports of our own cavalry had now established the fact that the enemy had moved north to Reims, and certainly had not turned south. If you consult the map (see the sketch for the 25th of August in the Official Account) you will notice at once that a continuation of the westward movement, at least on the part of the left wing of the Third Army, against an enemy at or near Reims, must result in a blow in the air, entailing much loss of time.

The Royal Headquarters, therefore, in arranging the orders for the 26th, kept in mind the concentration of the enemy on the 22nd in the vicinity of Reims, and directed a general change of the direction of march on the part of all the troops, so that both armies would move north-west instead of west on the 26th. It was just as if the command “half-right” had been given.

The orders for the Meuse Army were :

The XII. Corps was to reach Vienne,

The Guard Corps St. Menehould,

The IV. Corps Villers-en-Argonne.

The cavalry were to be thrown well out to the front, the right flank to reconnoitre Vouziers and Buzancy, and the Third Army particularly was to reach the line

¹ See Official Account, vol. ii., part i., p. 202, et seq.—ED.

Givry-en-Argonne—Changy. In this position it was intended to oppose the enemy in front with the right wing (Meuse Army), and to attack his right flank with the left wing (Third Army) in case he attempted to advance eastward. The Official Account states, however, that such an advance of the enemy, particularly by the circuitous route along the Belgian frontier, was considered so risky an undertaking, that it was not expected. Preparations were nevertheless made to meet such a move, "in case it took place." The movements prescribed in the army order of 11 a.m. on the 25th August were in the first place intended to place the army in a position from which to seek and defeat the enemy who was presumed to be in a flank position either at Reims or at Laon, reserving further orders for the 26th according to the reports of the cavalry. The army order even contemplated a day of rest on the 27th. The latter seemed necessary, for the troops had made four long marches and would have to be concentrated, leading to increased fatigue and privations, should the enemy be found in such a position. A rest was all the more desirable as it was presumed that the arrangements for supplies which had been made by the corps for a different direction of march, would be upset by the change and that a day would be required to regulate the same. It was also known that the country (Champagne pouilleuse) to be traversed offered few resources, and the troops therefore had to be provided with a considerable store of supplies. This is the first time that an order from the Royal Headquarters dealing with strategical measures mentions the matter of supplies.

It is interesting to read how the authors of the Official Account immediately after mentioning this order offer explanations, as it were, for the fact that the Royal Headquarters interfered with the detail arrangements of the Meuse Army by issuing direct orders to the corps.¹

¹ See vol. ii., p. 203.—ED.

You are aware how strenuously this was avoided and was resorted to only when exceptionally pressing reasons rendered it necessary. In this case it was needed to avoid crossings of the columns on the right wing of the Third Army.

You need take no exception to the fact that the order of 11 a.m. of the 25th was not carried out. These orders had to be suspended during the night, because later reports rendered it necessary. Still the order in question does not lose its significance. It furnishes firmer foundation for instructive meditation than fancy-battles or fancy-operations which we frequently read nowadays, as for instance in the strategical-tactical problems so often referred to by me, and which yet offer so much that is interesting and instructive for any one interested in military matters. The order is based on actual facts which really happened, and it is as useful to discuss the reason why it was necessary, as to discuss the orders of the 31st August which led to the battle of Sedan. Imagination (i.e. the execution) alone is wanting in the case of the former. That, however, will lead neither you nor me astray since our purpose is to learn, not to amuse ourselves.

Immediately after this army order you may read in the Official Account, that the necessary measures in case the enemy, contrary to all expectation, should commence the march along the Belgian frontier, had been duly considered at the Royal Headquarters. It was assumed that he might, in that case, reach Vouziers on the 25th August. You see how correct this calculation was, for MacMahon's right wing was actually at Vouziers by that date, and you also find there a "march table," according to which seven German army corps were to be concentrated at Damvillers by the 28th August, where MacMahon's march might have been opposed.¹

¹ See vol. ii., p. 204, Official Account.—ED.

Here we have again the old story of three possible cases and a fourth which really happened: viz. first the advance to the west arranged for up to the 28th, but not ordered; secondly, the order to the armies for the 26th, which was issued in order to change the direction of the march to the north-west and which was countermanded as we shall presently see, and thirdly, the "march table" for concentrating seven army corps at Damvillers, to the north-east, but which was not issued for the moment. The fourth case which actually happened, was that the French Army moved eastward in a hesitating manner, thereby giving the German Armies time to oppose them west of the Meuse by a movement due north. In this instance the fourth case which happened but had not been foreseen, was the most favourable of all.

You will perhaps tell me, that what we recognized as so ruinous in the manner in which Gyulai led his army happened here, and that luck alone prevented the commanders of the German Army from having an equally bitter experience. The difference is this, however, and for that reason I lay special stress on the fourth case, the German commanders did not introduce the three "cases" in its orders, although due consideration was given them. It is especially instructive to observe how the Supreme Command now issued orders for each day and reserved the power of taking the proper steps as each emergency should arise. As I pointed out to you on a former occasion, it is only possible for a commander to act in this independent manner who is not obliged to submit his plan of operations to a superior and be thus bound to adhere to it. This fact contributes greatly to the superiority of an army, especially when the commander and sovereign are united in one person.

If I now mention the arrangements for the march made by the Guard Corps in pursuance of the army order of

the 25th August, you will be able to estimate the consequences of this order, though it was not carried out. The march dispositions of the Guard Corps were issued at 10 p.m.

After giving the necessary information about the enemy, the higher commands, and the neighbouring corps, of which the XII. Corps was to march to Vienne, the IV. Corps to Villers-en-Argonne ;

The Cavalry Division of the Guard was ordered to move the Dragoon Brigade to Valmy and Virginy, the Uhlan Brigade to Minaucourt and Wargemoulin, the Cuirassier Brigade to Courtemont-le-Poncelet (divisional headquarters) and to Dommartin-sous-Hans.

The 1st Infantry Division of the Guard was to march from Esclaires and Senard through Vieil Dampierre and Daucourt, leaving St. Menehould on the *west*, to Neuville-au-Pont, advance guard to Berzieux (starting at 6 a.m.). St. Menehould, where the Royal Headquarters was to be established, was to be occupied by one battalion and the regimental band of the 1st Infantry Regiment of the Guard. The 1st Infantry Division and the Cavalry Division of the Guard were to provide for the security of their left flank.

The 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard was ordered to march at 6 a.m. from Brizeaux through Villers-en-Argonne, Verrières, St. Menehould (passing that town on the east if possible) to Moiremont (headquarters), advance guard to Vienne-la-Ville.

The two infantry divisions were charged to take steps to avoid crossings or delays near St. Menehould on their march. The Corps Artillery was to start at 7 a.m. and march through Vaubécourt, Triaucourt, Villers-en-Argonne, to Chaude Fontaine, passing St. Menehould by the *east*. Ammunition columns by the same road to La Grange-aux-Bois. Corps Headquarters were to be established at St. Menehould.

If this march had been executed, the points of the

advance guards of the Corps would have traversed half the distance to Vouziers, the enemy's position on the preceding day. Had the latter advanced in the direction of the Corps with equal speed, the foremost of the hostile armies would have come into collision on that evening.

The distance covered by the troops was considerable. The leading troops of the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard had to march 19, the main body 18, those in rear $23\frac{3}{4}$ miles to their new quarters. The 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard had to cover $16\frac{1}{2}$ and $21\frac{1}{2}$ miles. Some of the troops would therefore have had to make a forced march. Nothing is more natural than that you should ask: "Were matters really so urgent as to demand such efforts from the troops?"

I must answer this very natural question in detail. The Meuse Army had arrived at the eastern extremity of the Argonne Forest on the 25th August. If the next march was to be to the west this inhospitable region would have to be traversed at once; for a shorter march would have obliged the corps to halt in the defiles of this forest, where timely support by the other corps would have been impossible. If for instance the XII. Corps had merely marched to St. Menehould, the Guard Corps to Villers-en-Argonne, the IV. Corps to Vieil Dampierre, the first would have been in danger of being attacked alone on the following day by the whole hostile Army. For the direction in which the latter had turned was not known. The road from Reims to St. Menehould might just as well have been taken, as that to Vouziers. The Corps order that the Cavalry and 1st Infantry Division of the Guard were to provide for the safety of their flank proves that it was believed possible that the enemy might be there. Moreover such arrangements would simply have produced a movement to the west, not to the north-west. The two-fold necessity of moving in a north-westerly direction and of traversing the Argonnes Forest in one day, rendered this extraordinary march unavoidable.

The fatigue of the troops marching at the rear of the columns would not have been so great, if the divisions had been in cantonments of less depth on the 25th August, and had been closed up, if necessary by bivouacking. On the other hand the easy marches up to the 25th August (inclusive) had got the troops into good condition to withstand the fatigue on the 26th, whereas bivouacs would have tried them more than marching. Just ask an infantry soldier whether he prefers to march 25 miles and get under cover, or 20 miles and bivouac. Moreover, comfortable cantonments had been arranged for the 25th August with the idea that the march would be continued on the 26th August to the west in the same unmolested manner as before. Later reports about the enemy now rendered a sudden change in the direction of the march necessary.

You see how the troops make their arrangements when orders have been issued for several days in advance, and how sudden alterations caused by the enemy interfere with the same and fatigue the men. It is only possible to make dispositions for a long period when it is absolutely certain that during that time the enemy cannot interfere with them. The Supreme Command had assumed as a certainty, in fixing on the 21st the destinations for the 26th August, that the enemy would remain at Châlons busily engaged in reorganization, and that it was not possible to come into touch with him during this period. Yet the orders for the 26th had to be changed on the 25th.

Any initiative, however erroneous, may upset the enemy's plans and be injurious to his troops if only by inflicting fatiguing marches on them. However faulty and risky the French operations to the east may have been, still the mere evacuation of the Camp of Châlons and the march to Reims caused no slight inconvenience to the German troops. In discussing the 26th August you will notice how great the change in the orders for

the movements of the German troops subsequently became, as the enemy's march to the east became more and more probable and, finally, certain. In strategy nothing can be more incorrect than rigid inactivity, for the initiative is always an advantage, and consequently detrimental to the enemy. Even a faulty initiative is better than none. The greatest commanders of all ages owe more to their unceasing activity and initiative, than to greatness of mind and insight. Two days after the almost annihilating defeat of Kunersdorf, Frederick the Great wrote to one of his lieutenants, that he was seeking an opportunity to take the enemy at a disadvantage. Blücher owed his successes chiefly to the fact that he was the personification of initiative. Napoleon's motto which he again and again repeated to his subordinates, was "*activité, activité, vitesse!*" I will not repeat what I have already said on this subject when we were discussing Gyulai's action at the Lomellina and the impression his half-hearted movements against Turin and Montebello made on his opponent. Still I cannot refrain from reminding you how different the spirit and confidence of the troops are when they are told: "we are marching against the enemy," and when they are conscious: "the enemy is coming in this, or that, or some other direction."

In following on the map the order of march of the Guard Corps for the 26th, you will notice that two roads were to be used, one *viâ* Villers-en-Argonne—Verrières—St. Mennehoult by the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard, the other *viâ* Le Chemin—Vieil Dampierre—Daucourt—St. Mennehoult by the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard, etc. The latter had to go considerably out of its way, and this increased the march of some of the troops to 24 miles. You may ask here whether it would not have been better to let the whole corps march on the road assigned to the 2nd Division, which would have consider-

ably diminished the distance marched by the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard. It also appears at first sight as though the Guard Corps would have been in the way of the IV. Corps by the joint use of the road through Vieil Dampierre, since the latter had to march from Laheycourt to Villers-en-Argonne. It merely seems so, but in reality we find on examining the country by the aid of the general staff map that this was not the case. The IV. Corps would not have selected the road through Givry-en-Argonne (where, after all, it collided with the Third Army) and Vieil Dampierre, to march from Laheycourt to Villers-en-Argonne, but would have remained on the east side of the Argonnes (Forêt de Belval), because that road was shorter and safer; it would therefore have marched behind the Guard Corps from Le Chemin and Senard, i.e. the last 5 miles of its march. To avoid blocking the march of the IV. Corps, the Guard should have endeavoured to clear the roads in time by starting early and shortening the columns. The point of the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard was in cantonments close to Le Chemin, and the depth of its column would have been 10,682 paces. If the Division marched at 6 a.m., the last troops might easily have passed Le Chemin by 8 a.m., since its heavy losses at St. Privat, which had not been replaced, left it $\frac{1}{3}$ short of its strength. But the head of the IV. Corps approaching from Laheycourt could not reach Le Chemin by 8 a.m., for the distance was over 9 miles.

The depth of the column of the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard was not more than 6000 paces for the same reason; adding 3300 paces for the Corps Artillery, and 2160 paces for the ammunition columns (only 4 infantry ammunition columns were present, because all those of the artillery had been sent to the rear to be filled up), a total depth of march for the right column of 11,500 paces. The 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard, whose point was to start from Brizeaux, might

reach Villers-en-Argonne, 5 miles away, in two hours, and the whole column with a depth of a little over 5 miles might have easily passed through that place in 5 hours after the start at 11 a.m. The head of the IV. Corps, 14 miles away, could hardly have arrived there before this hour. On the other hand, if only this one road had been allotted to the Guard Corps, the depth of the column would have been increased by that of the 1st Infantry Division, and it might easily have happened, that the Corps could not complete its passage through Villers-en-Argonne, which it was impossible to avoid, in time to prevent crossing the IV. Corps.

As regards the increased efforts of the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard caused by the detour through Vieil Dampierre, it is very doubtful, whether the fatigue would have been lessened by placing this Division behind the other and marching the whole Corps on one road. It is well known that the delays and checks, and also the fatigue, increase considerably with the number of troops on the same road. A division will therefore gladly make a detour, if by so doing it can retain the sole use of one for itself. We have seen that the French Army, crowded together in dense masses so that it could use but few parallel roads, marched barely 9 miles a day and yet became exhausted by crossings and checks. The arrangements of the Guard Corps to march on two roads on the 26th August must meet with unqualified approval.

Your attention is perhaps attracted by that passage of the order which was intended to prevent the two columns crossing at St. Meneshould. For the roads assigned them from Daucourt and Verrières to St. Meneshould join each other shortly before reaching the last-named place, and it might have happened that both divisions had to march side by side for some distance, in which case the high road Givry-St. Meneshould would have been completely blocked, or one division would have had to wait till the other had passed, and we should have completely lost, in

this manner, the advantage of using two roads. The former had to be avoided at any cost, for a road should never be completely blocked by the troops marching on it, otherwise orders and reports cannot pass. In this case it was all the more to be avoided, since the long column formed by the Royal Headquarters was expected on the same road. I am inclined to think that the order from corps headquarters was not sufficient. For conflicting opinions and checks would nevertheless have arisen, if the two divisional commanders present had failed to come to an understanding. I think it would have been more correct if the corps commander had sent forward a general staff officer and directed the divisions to abide by his decision. Since the march was never executed, we are unable to judge whether the order of the Corps Commander would have sufficed to prevent checks.

The order to the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard to pass St. Menehould on the west, the 2nd Division, if possible, on the east, was given because the Royal Headquarters was established in the town and it was therefore desirable not to block communication. It is not possible to judge from the general staff map, whether the place can be passed on the east, for that reason the words "if possible" are added in the case of the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard. If it was impossible to pass the town on the east, the 2nd Division was to march through it, and the 1st Division to the west of it, thus avoiding a crossing of the columns.

I am unable to tell you where the heavy baggage was directed to in this march. If I remember right, it was to march from Chaumont sur Aire on the 26th August by the high road through Clermont, east of the Argennes Forest, to the vicinity of Les Islettes, where there was no danger of crossing other troops or columns.

Permit me to relate briefly the events of the 25th

August, so far as the Guard Corps is concerned. They were neither numerous nor important strategically. They, however, brought a change in the previous monotony of life on the march. The not inconsiderable march of almost 19 miles was completed by 1 p.m., causing comparatively little fatigue, thanks to the pleasantly cool weather and the good arrangements made. Soon after the report arrived of the capture of a Garde Mobile battalion by the 6th Cavalry Division. The prisoners were escorted to the headquarters of the Guard Corps at Triaucourt. On the way there they made the before-mentioned attempt to escape from the escort, and commenced to fight again. With the assistance of the Dragoons and Rifles of the Guard who were in the vicinity, they were overpowered after a short resistance and brought into Triaucourt about dark. With the exception of the officers the whole battalion was in civilian dress and the men had fought without any military badges, and, after surrendering, had attempted to free themselves by force. They were therefore beyond the protection which international law accords to prisoners of war. However, the kindly heart of our commander prevented him from treating them with harshness. But precautions against renewed attempts at escape had to be taken, and these were, indeed, all the more necessary as the battalion quartered at Triaucourt was but half as strong as the battalion of prisoners. All of them, about 1000, were locked up in the church till next morning. The inhabitants of Triaucourt crowded around the prisoners. Many had friends and relations among them, for the Garde Mobile raised in this town belonged to this battalion. Our battalion therefore formed a double cordon when the prisoners arrived, in order to keep them separate from the inhabitants. Some of the latter broke through the cordon to greet here and there a brother, a son, etc. In the darkness it was impossible for our soldiers to know who was a prisoner and who was not, and therefore every man dressed in civilian

attire who had broken through the cordon, was locked up in the church for the night and comforted with the thought of being identified next day. The inhabitants brought to the guard the most indispensable food for the prisoners. Comical scenes were not wanting. An amiable gentleman, L., though a rather officious newspaper correspondent, accompanied the corps headquarters. He went out to witness the arrival of the prisoners and was pushed by the crowd through the cordon into the midst of the prisoners. When he attempted to get back, the soldiers of the cordon would not let him pass and he was about to be locked up, when I arrived and delivered him from his unpleasant situation. The host of our commander fared in a similar manner. He had been locked up, when the latter identified him and had him set free. Forgive these unstrategical diversions, they may serve to amuse you a little.

After the orders had been received and all arrangements been made accordingly, we went to bed anticipating a fatiguing day on the morrow. But on the same evening the Supreme Command received information which upset all previous dispositions. You will doubtless consent to discuss these reports and the decisions connected with them, when I write to you about the 26th August, although they were respectively received and formed on the 25th. I therefore close for to-day.

TWENTY-SIXTH LETTER.

THE 26TH AUGUST.—THE MARCH TO THE NORTH.

ON the evening of the 25th August the Supreme Command received information, which threw still more doubt on the correctness of the previous estimate of the enemy's intentions. Further news, though no definite reports came from the cavalry, made the march of hostile troops on Vouziers become more and more probable.

One French newspaper stated that no French general could desert his comrade without incurring the curse of his country. Other daily papers from Paris reported speeches from the Chamber of Deputies which said that if the Rhine Army (Bazaine) was left at Metz without support it would be a disgrace to the French nation. Finally a telegram from London brought the information from the Paris *Temps* of the 23rd August, that MacMahon had suddenly decided to hasten to relieve Bazaine, that the whole Army of Châlons had already marched from Reims, and that no news had yet reached Montmédy of the approach of French troops (indicating that Bazaine was expected at that place).

A further proof that the clamour of the newspapers and deputies, I mean those who knew nothing about war, drowned the voice of rational strategy and sound common sense, and drove the Army of Châlons to its destruction.

All this news, which arrived at the Royal Headquarters on the evening of the 25th, confirming the intercepted letter of the French officer from Metz, was not based on official communications to the newspapers, and therefore

could not be implicitly relied on. Our cavalry had not reached the neighbourhood of Vouziers ; at least no report had been received to that effect.

Nor did the newspapers contain any official announcements of the Government. The Supreme Command saw at once that the movement, indicated by this news, would lead the enemy into a perilous situation. The Emperor was known to be a man of prudence and deliberation. Marshal MacMahon was a skilful leader. It must therefore have been difficult to believe that these two men would embark on such a foolhardy enterprise. Yet, supposing the enemy nevertheless were to undertake it? It was only rash and dangerous, if the German Armies took prompt counter-measures. The latter must be executed on the 26th August, for if the right wing of the French Army really was at Vouziers on the 25th, the left wing might be at Le Chesne and reach the line Buzancy-Oches-Beaumont on the 26th August. If the German Armies had in the meantime marched to the line St. Menehould—Givry-en-Argonne—Changy, according to the orders for the 26th, the right of the German Army would, by the evening, have been 25 miles from the right of the French Army, and both armies would have been equidistant from Metz. It would then have been impossible for the German armies to intercept the enemy's march in time. If the French Army developed marching powers equal to that of the Germans, the investing army might have been caught between two fires, by MacMahon and Bazaine, perhaps between Metz and Briey. Though in that case the Third and Meuse Armies would have hastened by forced marches to support the investing Army, the latter might nevertheless have suffered a very serious reverse. Though this might have been made good the next day, it was better not to risk it. You will perhaps meet me with my own words, by which I hinted the other day, that MacMahon might have been allowed to march into Metz in order to shut him up

there with Bazaine, the Meuse and Third Armies following up the former and attacking him in rear. That might have happened, and Napoleon I. acted in a similar manner before Mantua in allowing the relieving army to enter and shutting it up also. But his desperate situation practically forced him to do so. It is better to prevent the junction of the hostile forces and to defeat them in detail with the mass of your forces, "Divide et impera."

I can well understand the painful uncertainty into which the German Headquarters must have been plunged by the news which reached them on the evening of the 25th August. Nothing was definitely known. On the one hand there was the assumption that the French would adopt that course which seemed most advantageous for themselves—and this assumption must always be acted upon until the contrary has been proved—on the other hand, the indications and rumours to the contrary were increasing. Should the latter happen whilst the operations for the former contingency were being executed, the unpleasant consequences before mentioned might result; or again, if preparations were made to guard against a turning movement from the north, and the French were, after all, *not* to undertake that turning movement,—then two or three days would be lost in coming up with them, which would afford them the opportunity of receiving reinforcements, and recovering from their previous reverses. The Supreme Command of the German Army was naturally unwilling to grant the enemy this respite, as by so doing, it would be relinquishing the advantage already gained. I must honestly confess that I can hardly conceive a more difficult task than that of forming a correct decision in such a complicated situation. The Official Account states: "In view of the peculiar conditions of France it became more and more probable that the demands of politics had prevailed over all military considerations." That means, the Supreme Command began to believe it possible that the Government of

France had stifled the voice of sound reason in order to maintain itself against the clamour of the rabble. Still, this had happened before, when the French Government began the war without being prepared for it, and when, after the reverses of the 6th August, a timely retreat of the whole army towards Châlons was deferred until too late.

The Supreme Command decided to put off taking decisive measures as long as was possible without losing a day for the operations. It was hoped that definite reports from the cavalry would at least reach the headquarters of the Meuse Army. The Supreme Command could not wait for these reports and had to issue its instructions on the evening of the 25th August. The final decision as to the direction of the future advance was confidently placed in the hands of the commander of the Meuse Army.

The army corps of the latter were therefore halted by a direct order from the Royal Headquarters and told to wait until noon for the orders which were expected to arrive from their army headquarters. The instructions to the latter were as follows: If the reports of the cavalry confirmed the fact of MacMahon's march eastwards by noon, the "march" table was to be carried out, and seven army corps were to be concentrated, on the 28th August, near Damvillers, on the east of the Meuse. The army investing Metz was directed to move two corps so as to reach the neighbourhood of Damvillers and Mangiennes on the 28th August. It was left to the discretion of the commander of the investing army, to raise the investment if necessary on the right bank of the Mosel, but under all circumstances he was to prevent the escape of the French Army to the west.

The Supreme Command did not content itself with issuing written orders. General staff officers, familiar with the situation and the intentions of the Royal Headquarters, were sent to the commander of the Meuse Army and the corps, which were to halt until noon, in order

to prevent errors and to give the commanders such information as would enable them to form their independent decisions in accordance with the ideas of the Supreme Command. Here we again have the verbal transmission of the intentions, which I mentioned on a former occasion, and which is better and arrives more speedily than those sheets of written orders which are sometimes so hard to understand.

The staff officer (Lieut.-Colonel von Verdy) who was sent from Bar-le-Duc to Fleury during the night, arrived there at daybreak. He brought the following instructions for the Crown Prince of Saxony:—If the cavalry of the Meuse Army had not reported by noon whether the enemy held Vouziers and Buzancy or not, the march to the north was to be commenced, which would move the XII. Corps to Varennes, the Guard Corps to Dombasle, and the IV. Corps to Fleury on the 26th August. In other words, if the uncertainty as to what direction the enemy had taken should continue beyond mid-day on the 26th, it was considered preferable to intercept his possible march to the east, and to run the risk of losing time by such a movement, if the conjectures as to the enemy's intentions should prove erroneous, rather than to march in a north-westerly direction towards Vienne and St. Menehould, and so run the risk of being turned on the right by the enemy.

At the time of Lieut.-Colonel von Verdy's arrival, the Crown Prince of Saxony was able to state, that, judging by the hours of starting and the directions taken by the 5th and 6th Cavalry Divisions, no report could possibly arrive before noon. (We know that during the night of the 25th August the 5th Cavalry Division was at St. Menehould, the 6th at Vieil Dampierre, advanced parties of both at the Yèvre brook, and the 12th at Clermont-en-Argonne. The 5th and 12th Cavalry Divisions were nearest to Vouziers and Buzancy, though still 25 miles away.) Nor could an answer have been received by noon

if an order had been sent to urge expedition. The Crown Prince of Saxony therefore decided to order the march northwards at 5 a.m. on his own responsibility. This was entirely in accordance with the intentions of the Supreme Command, and also lessened in all probability the fatigue which the troops might otherwise have been obliged to undergo; they had a long march before them, the execution of which, unless ordered before noon, might be rendered doubtful by the complete change in the instructions issued for the day. You must bear in mind further that the order had to be sent from Fleury to Triaucourt and Laheycourt (7 and 9 miles respectively), and that orders would have to be prepared at these places, and that it was not known whether the troops had received the order to halt in time, as it might be assumed that they would start at 6 a.m. in accordance with the previous dispositions.

The orders now issued to the Meuse Army directed the 12th and 5th Cavalry Divisions to advance from Clermont and St. Menehould to Bant héville and Grand Pré respectively, and to reconnoitre the country as far as Dun, Buzancy and Vouziers. The 6th Cavalry Division was to move to Tahure, keeping in touch with the 5th on their right, and to reconnoitre the vicinity of Reims. The XII. Army Corps was to march to Varennes, the Guard Corps and its Cavalry Division to Dombasle, and the IV. Corps to Fleury. To avoid checks on the march the Guard Corps was ordered to march in two columns at 11 a.m., the IV. Corps to follow at 2 p.m. In this manner the Meuse Army, by a skilful transposition of its corps, made a complete wheel to the right. The three corps in line had hitherto fronted to the west; after this march two corps were facing north on the road Varennes-Verdun with one corps 7 miles to the rear in reserve.

Let us now consider the measures adopted by the Third Army in connection with those of the Meuse Army. The Commander-in-Chief of the Army with his chief-of-the-staff

had proceeded in the morning to the Royal Headquarters at Bar-le-Duc, and after learning the situation, requested that not only the two Bavarian Corps should be sent to support the Meuse Army on the 26th, but that he should follow northwards the day after with all the remaining troops of the Third Army. He maintained that a possible detour and loss of time in advancing on Paris would entail fewer disadvantages, than if all available forces were not brought up for a decisive battle in the north. His Majesty the King concurred in this opinion. At the same time, since no report had been received from the cavalry, direct orders were sent from the Royal Headquarters to the IV. and Guard Corps to march to Fleury and Dombasle, and the I. and II. Bavarian Corps to Erise-la-Petite and Triaucourt.

These facts show how important it is, that the subordinate leaders should not only execute in their own sphere the dispositions received, but also act independently on their own responsibility, in accordance with the ideas of the superior authority, when circumstances show it to be necessary. Both commanders here showed an initiative in obedience not possessed by every leader. Had the commander of the Meuse Army clung to the letter of the order and waited for reports from the cavalry until noon, the order to march north could not have been sent from Fleury until the afternoon. The corps, especially the Guard and XII. Corps, would have had to wait until late in the afternoon (for the direct order from the Royal Headquarters could not have reached them earlier on account of the distance) before commencing a march which would then have extended until late next morning. I am sure you will admit all this when you hear how fatiguing the actual march on the 26th was for these two corps. They would have been unfit for anything on the 27th August, and the XII. Corps, being isolated at Varennes, might have been placed in a most dangerous situation. At any rate these two corps would have lost a day's march, which

would have given the situation an entirely different aspect.

The commander of the Third Army obtained the approval of the Supreme Command for his plans. He could do so without loss of time, because on his way from Ligny-en-Barrois to Revigny in the morning he passed the Royal Headquarters at Bar-le-Duc. (The commander of the Meuse Army could not act thus on account of the distance.) But suppose he had silently obeyed the order and merely directed the two Bavarian Corps to the north and continued the march to the north-west with the three Prussian Corps and the Wurttemberg Division. You will agree with me, that the V. and XI. Corps would not have been at Sedan, and the French Army would therefore in this battle have found a retreat open to Mézières. I have repeatedly called your attention to the necessity of granting freedom of action to the commanders of large masses; in fact, to all independent commanders, who should, however, conform to the intentions of their superiors; the 26th August furnishes an additional proof of this. At the same time note the conscientious and scrupulous honesty of the narrative in the Official Account. Had there been the least desire to make out that all the operations of the German Armies leading up to the historical event of Sedan, had emanated from the Supreme Command alone, the Official Account might easily have omitted the above-mentioned exchange of opinions, for there is no written record of the latter. (Napoleon III. acted differently in his statement of the events, as Wimpffen's work will show you.)

Early in the morning before leaving Ligny-en-Barrois, the Third Army had despatched orders to the advanced cavalry to move obliquely to the north, because it was thought probable that the whole Army would march in that direction. The Uhlan Brigade of the II. Bavarian Corps was ordered to move from La Frêne to Suippe, the 4th Cavalry Division from Châlons to Vouziers, and

the 2nd Cavalry Division to Châlons. On arriving at Revigny-aux-Vaches, the Third Army ordered the three Prussian Corps and the Wurttemberg Division to march on the 27th August, and occupy the line St. Meneshould-Vavray (north-east of Vitry).

The Official Account does not mention whether, or at what time on the 26th August, a report arrived from Major Klocke, nor the substance of the same. We know that he arrived with two squadrons at St. Leonhardt, 2½ miles east of Châlons, on the preceding afternoon, and bivouacked there. He might have heard something of the movement of the hostile Army in the direction of Vouziers, and with well-organized relays, his report might have reached the headquarters of the Third Army during the night (76 miles in 8 hours). I am inclined, therefore, to think that the readiness with which the Crown Prince of Prussia accepted the theory of the enemy's march to the east may have been based on some such report. It would have been the only reliable information up to that time, and would have been confirmed by the rumours in those newspapers which had spoken of this march.

Let us now turn our attention to the actual events of the 26th August. Contrary to my previous custom, I shall commence to-day with the movements of the German armies in connection with the various opinions, orders, and instructions which were issued one after the other.

The cavalry of the Meuse Army had already commenced its march in the direction first ordered, when the orders issued at 5 a.m. were received. The 12th Cavalry Division had accordingly moved from Clermont in the direction of Autry (on the Aisne and road to Vouziers), and had despatched a flank patrol (18th Uhlans) to Grand Pré on the right. The Division now turned to the right

through Charpentry in rear of the right flank patrol, which thus became its left flank patrol, and took the direction of Banthéville, its new destination. This flank patrol encountered a hostile squadron at Fléville, 4 miles on this side of Grand Pré, and then retired through Exermont. The Division now despatched a squadron of the heavy cavalry of the Guard under Captain von Klenck to Grand Pré for more detailed information about the enemy. This squadron reached Juvin, $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Grand Pré, and reported at 4 p.m. that infantry, cavalry, and wagons were seen marching to the north from Grand Pré (this report arrived at the Royal Headquarters at Clermont at 7 p.m., *via* Banthéville, 24 miles in 3 hours). Leaving the enemy at Grand Pré on their left, the squadron moved off to Buzancy. The Cavalry Division also sent a squadron of Uhlans towards Buzancy, another towards Dun, and an officer's patrol towards Beaumont. The squadron moving on Buzancy encountered two hostile battalions apparently marching west, north of the Bois de la Folie, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of Buzancy, and then retired through Barricourt to Villers-devant-Dun, followed by hostile cavalry. On the return of the 1st squadron of the heavy cavalry of the Guard to the Division at 9 p.m., Captain von Klenck reported that the enemy had retired from Buzancy at 7 p.m., and that the inhabitants stated that the enemy (consisting of one regiment of infantry, with some cavalry and artillery) had retired on Vouziers. The squadron which rode to Dun found that place unoccupied. The report of the officer's patrol which rode to Beaumont could not reach the Royal Headquarters in time to influence the plans for the 27th, for Lieut. von Ende did not encounter the enemy until 4 a.m. on the 27th August near Beaumont.

The 5th Cavalry Division had also moved off from St. Meneshould in the direction of Vouziers before it received the counter-order to march on Grand Pré. It therefore turned off to Montcheutin and bivouacked between Autry

and Montcheutin, because the patrols of an advance guard squadron sent to Senuc were fired upon on the left bank of the Aire as they were advancing on Grand Pré, and large bodies of troops of all arms were seen in the vicinity of that place. As the road near Grand Pré was barred, and consequently afforded no view over the surrounding country, it was impossible to reconnoitre towards Buzancy; but a squadron was left on the road to Vouziers, with orders to send non-commissioned officer's patrols from Sechault in that direction. One of these patrols, under Serjeant Brohmann, of the 13th Dragoons, approached to within $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles of Vouziers, and reported the enemy in large numbers to the east of that town. This report did not arrive at the Royal Headquarters until 4 p.m. on the 27th August.

The 6th Cavalry Division only received the order to march to Tahure, when it had already reached Auve (17 miles east of Châlons). It then turned north to Tahure. An officer's patrol (1st Lieut. von Werthern, of the 16th Hussars) met that of Serjeant Brohmann and reported that troops of all arms were encamped between Chestres and Falaise, one or two regiments of infantry, a battery, and a battalion of chasseurs on the road to Longwé, and one squadron of lancers on this side of Vouziers. The town itself appeared to be unoccupied by the enemy. Inhabitants stated that about 14,000 men were concentrated here, that MacMahon was at Attigny and was expected at Vouziers in two days' time. The Division despatched this report from Tahure at 7 p.m., adding that the detachments sent towards Châlons and Reims had not encountered the enemy anywhere, and that all the French forces had left that neighbourhood and marched north. This report reached the Royal Headquarters at 5.15 a.m. on the 27th August, and thus it took more than 10 hours to cover 24 miles.

The Uhlan Brigade of the II. Bavarian Corps reached Suippe at midnight. The 4th Cavalry Division did not

receive the counter-order to advance until late on the evening of the 26th, and its execution had therefore to be postponed until the next day. It arrived at Châlons on the 26th, commenced collecting the supplies left in that camp, established communication with the 6th Cavalry Division and Wurttemberg Cavalry, and sent a detachment of 40 men to Epernay (the latter were attacked by the inhabitants and armed Garde Mobiles ; the lieutenant in command was wounded, and 1 officer and 4 men were taken prisoners). The two squadrons under Major Klocke advanced to Reims, which they found occupied by the enemy (they were the advanced troops of Vinoy's corps following in rear of the army). The reports of the 4th Cavalry Division cannot have reached the Royal Headquarters by the morning of the 27th August.

The 2nd Cavalry Division did not receive the counter-order for the 26th until the night. It had therefore obeyed the first order, which was to march from Chavanges to Aulnay and destroy the railroad near Payns, south of Mery.

You may think that these details of the cavalry work on the 26th August belong to tactics and not to strategy. But the strategical value of cavalry was most fully illustrated on the 26th August. The work it did and the number of the reports it sent enabled the Supreme Command by putting them together to form an accurate idea about the enemy and make plans for the 27th accordingly. The general result of the reports showed, that the enemy's main forces, which would have to be dealt with first, must be supposed to be at Vouziers and Attigny on the evening of the 26th, and that our own movements would have to be regulated by what the enemy could, and probably would, undertake from this position. It was certain that the enemy had actually moved from Châlons to Reims, and from thence to Vouziers, and therefore contemplated a march to the north-east, round our right flank, for the purpose of effecting a junction with Bazaine. It was of

the utmost importance, therefore, at once to intercept and defeat this movement, which had up till then been considered as an unlikely one for the French to make.

The work accomplished by the cavalry on the 26th August thus relieved the Supreme Command of all those doubts which might have caused it to hesitate in coming to a decision, and thus teaches us the necessity of observing the most minute details in reconnoitring, if the cavalry is to retain its importance as a factor in strategy. In the first place we learn that the Supreme Command requires a vast amount of information, in order to form a correct opinion on any situation. In the present instance the individual reports were not sufficient, some of them were even contradictory. East of Buzancy, hostile infantry had been observed marching to the west, and at Grand Pré, to the north; it was also reported that troops were marching from Buzancy to Vouziers, and it was only by putting all this information together that the exact position of the enemy's main forces on the evening of the 26th August, could be ascertained. This shows that a single reconnaissance is useless. The patrol may be deceived, may be unfortunate, act awkwardly, and accidentally cause wrong conclusions to be drawn. It is therefore necessary to extend a number of these feelers in various directions. At the manœuvres I have constantly observed all the cavalry officers sent out at the head of patrols. In spite of the frequent complaints that no one was left to command the troops, I cannot call this an unmixed evil, since it enables so many more officers to gain experience in the art of reconnaissance than would otherwise be the case. In war time I grant that this would be impossible, but on the other hand, it is so absolutely necessary that the decisions of the Supreme Command should not be allowed to depend on one single report, that the requisite number of patrols will have to be made up by allowing non-commissioned officers to

take the place of those officers who cannot be spared for this purpose.

The events of the 26th August further demonstrate that it is advisable to reconnoitre particularly important points, from two or more sides simultaneously. For instance, three patrols were sent to Buzancy; one from the east (near the Bois de la Folie) by the 18th Uhlans, two from the south, by Captain von Klenck's squadron, and by the 5th Cavalry Division. The three last-mentioned parties were unable to force their way through the enemy's lines, and had it not been for the patrol from the east, no information about Buzancy would have been obtained. Again, in reconnoitring Vouziers, two patrols were employed; the one under Serjeant Brohmann, of the 5th Cavalry Division, was not able to hand its report to the Royal Headquarters until 4 p.m. on the 27th August, too late for it to have been of any use in planning the operations for that day; whilst the other report sent by Lieut. von Werthern, of the 6th Cavalry Division, was only just received in time.

Accidents such as these are unavoidable, whatever their cause, and it is only by recognizing this fact, and acting accordingly, that grave disasters can be avoided.

A further lesson taught by the action of the cavalry on this day is that as the chief object of all reconnoitring parties (be they large or small), is to observe, without being observed themselves, a skilfully handled patrol is often of far more use than a squadron, for not only is it more difficult for the larger body to escape detection, but it is often tempted by the consciousness of its own strength, to engage the enemy, a course which ought only to be taken when its patrols are prevented from making the necessary observations by their inability to pass through the hostile line and it therefore becomes necessary to obtain by force what cunning is unable to accomplish. The squadron (Klenck's) sent by the 12th Cavalry

Division when the Uhlan patrol was unable to reconnoitre Grand Pré, is an instance of this.

To lead a patrol successfully requires considerable skill and resolution ; without these qualities it must either fail to gain its object, or fall into the hands of the enemy. One of our regimental commanders told me that his adjutant, after an engagement, followed close in rear of the retreating army, witnessed the manner in which they bivouacked and rode back before they had thrown out their outposts. Still even the cleverest patrol may have bad luck ; the neighing of a horse may betray its presence to the enemy, or it may fall into an ambush, as happened to the detachment of Uhlans which rode into Epernay. One officer and four men were overpowered and captured by the inhabitants. This reminds me of Gyulai's order, that infantry were to accompany all cavalry patrols, because some peasants, armed with pitchforks, had killed one hussar. How such an order would have limited our horizon ! On the 26th August the advanced parties of our cavalry were 47 miles in front of our leading troops !

However painful the loss of an officer's patrol may be, it is amply compensated for by the information received from the other patrols ; and after all, the death of a soldier in the execution of his duty is equally honourable whether caused by bullet or pitchfork ; indeed to my mind a greater amount of courage is required to ride alone towards the enemy than to advance under an effective fire in battle. To die a hero's death surrounded by comrades seems glorious to every soldier possessed of a keen sense of honour. The last words of General von François, on the Rother Berg at Spicheren, were : " How beautiful it is to die on the field of battle ; " he would hardly have said this had he been done to death by madly excited peasants ! It is a very different matter to be shot down on a lonely ride through dark forests, and there left to rot, with " missing " as the only word that is handed down to posterity in connection with your name !

When I imagine myself in the position of some of these patrol-leaders as they rode back in the dark to their own men, I confess to an uncanny feeling I never experienced when under fire.

A patrol leader must moreover have tactical and strategical discernment, if his report is to contain in a few words what is most desirable for the Commander-in-Chief to know. In most cases he must ride with a map in his hand, and whenever he finds a place occupied by the enemy he must at once be able to decide its locality. He will probably not meet a single person whom he can question, and even should he do so he must be able to judge, being in the enemy's country, whether their statements are correct or intentionally misleading. He should be able to deduce from their unmilitary answers what is the case from a military point of view. All this makes it desirable that every one commanding a patrol, should have had the training of a staff officer. Even non-commissioned officers may sometimes play an important part, as illustrated by the report of Serjeant Brohmann. Might not the cavalry be content with and proud of the important *rôle* it plays in strategy? And does it not surprise you that there are men with brains who, carried away by enthusiasm for their own arm, proclaim that cavalry will be useless in a future war?

These cavalry reports on which the plans of the Supreme Command and the army commanders were based, bring me to another highly important strategical subject: the selection of the position for the headquarters. It is undoubtedly of great value that on the arrival of the messages the Supreme Command should at once gain an accurate view of the whole situation, and not allow itself to be misled by one-sided and erroneous reports into premature opinions, which are subsequently very difficult to discard, instead of at once forming an accurate idea, by comparing all the reports. For in-

stance, had the Supreme Command received at first only that one from the east of Buzancy about the enemy's march to the west and made plans accordingly, it would have found difficulty in appreciating the opposite situation, and changing the dispositions already ordered. It is desirable for this reason that the army commanders, and the Supreme Command itself should receive all the cavalry reports concerning the enemy at the same time; i.e. the Headquarters should be as nearly as possible equidistant from every portion of the country which is covered by the cavalry. It is not sufficient, however, to merely receive the reports. There should be time to compare and piece them together, to deduce from their contents what the facts really are, to make out the orders and to despatch them so that they may arrive in good time for execution.

The Headquarters should therefore be in rear of the centre of the corps. Goltz gives an additional reason in his work "The Nation in Arms" why the Headquarters should not be placed in the front line. He wishes to remove it from immediate local impressions which do not represent the whole situation, and so to preserve the Commander-in-Chief's power of correctly estimating it. Nor should the latter be too far from the advanced cavalry if he wishes to receive its reports in good time.

It is for this reason that the headquarters of armies are usually established with the army corps which are about in the centre of the army, and only exceptionally will they be nearer to the enemy than the corps headquarters. In like manner the Royal Headquarters was generally located in rear of, or in line with the headquarters of the Armies, so that reports transmitted by the latter might not have to make a detour or go over the same road twice. Circumstances will cause various alterations and exceptions to this rule. When anything out of the common, or when the most important reports were expected from one flank or the other, the Headquarters

was established there. Thus the headquarters of the Meuse Army was established with the corps on the right wing whilst the *coup de main* against Verdun was being executed. Immediately afterwards it was transferred to Fleury, the centre of the army. When the most important reports were expected from the right flank, the headquarters was again established there on the 26th August (Clermont), where it met the Royal Headquarters which had moved there from the same motive.

There are other reasons which influence the selection of a position for the headquarters of an army. The headquarters staff comprises a large number of persons and has a considerable amount of work to transact. Mere shelter for man and horse is not sufficient. Provision must be made for a large number of officials of various ranks and for office purposes requiring localities which afford considerable accommodation. It has happened, of course, that the headquarters of a Commander-in-Chief have passed the night, or part of the night, in the open, as, for instance, Napoleon I. at Bautzen and Leipsic. This cannot, however, be continued for any length of time without impairing the interior working and administration of the army. A single night passed in the open compels the headquarters staff to defer a great deal of indispensable work until the next day, especially when pouring rain makes writing in the open impossible, as the torrents of rain did on the 19th August and 2nd September. Spacious accommodation must then be secured for the following day in order to despatch the accumulated work. On the 17th August the Royal Headquarters remained all day on the field of Vionville in anticipation of a battle, and returned in the afternoon to Pont-à-Mousson to do the office work, though a battle was certain to take place the next day. An early start had to be made on the 18th August to reach the heights of Flavigny in good time, i.e. the place which had been quitted the day before.

Even the daily change of quarters renders the despatch of the indispensable routine business difficult. The packing and unpacking of the offices and the march take up at least a morning or afternoon, which is thus lost for office work. We see, therefore, that the higher the rank of the general and his headquarters, the greater the temptation to remain in the same place whilst the troops are marching. After the battle of the 18th August the Royal Headquarters remained at Pont-à-Mousson from the 19th to the 23rd August, on the latter day it was transferred to Commercy, on the 24th August to Bar-le-Duc, where it remained for two days, whence it was moved on the 26th to Clermont. The Headquarters of the Third Army remained at Vaucouleurs on the 21st and 22nd, on the 23rd it moved to Ligny-en-Barrois and remained there for three nights; early on the 26th it moved through Bar-le-Duc to Revigny-aux-Vaches. From the latter place orders for the 26th were issued to the corps in the afternoon.

Personal comfort does not keep the headquarters in the same place. It would be much more pleasant to ride for a few hours each day than to make one long ride and then be tied to a desk for several days. It is the work with the pen that ties the headquarters to one locality. You may be surprised at my speaking of the requirements of an office whilst discussing strategy. But the pen is just as much a factor of the strategical work done by the Supreme Command, as the boot is in the strategical work done by the masses of infantry.

It will not have escaped your notice that on the 25th August the Royal Headquarters (at Bar-le-Duc) was 9 miles nearer the enemy than the headquarters of the Third Army. This exceptional case appeared to be perfectly safe, because it was confidently believed that the movements ordered for the 26th could be executed without coming in contact with the enemy. But on the 25th August those important reports arrived which

rendered changes in the previous dispositions unavoidable. It is quite possible that some of the reports of the 4th Cavalry Division to the commander of the Third Army reached the Royal Headquarters several hours later than would have been the case if its headquarters had moved to Revigny on the 25th and remained there on the 26th. However, it is easy for me to talk after the event, for I should not have foreseen that, had I been called upon to select a place for the headquarters of the Third Army for the 25th.

We are led to another consideration by the experience we had with the 4th and 2nd Cavalry Divisions, which were unable to carry out the movements ordered for the 26th, and had to postpone them to the 27th, because on account of the distance the orders were not received until late in the evening and during the night of the 26th respectively. What is the use of an order that cannot be carried out, and of what strategical use is a division which is so far away that an order cannot reach it in time? I will not, however, consider this as a typical case, it is an exceptional one. The orders were despatched on the same day from Ligny, and the possibility of their not being executed on that day was probably taken into consideration at the headquarters of the Third Army. For that reason the direction of march alone, and not the destinations to be reached, was laid down for each Division. Had it been possible to despatch these orders on the previous evening, they might have been received in time.

If these cavalry divisions had been still further away, so far that orders despatched in the evening could not have reached them during the night, then the Army commander could not have depended on the reports of what they had observed during that day, as these could not have reached Army headquarters in time to base the dispositions for the Army on them. You may now judge yourself by how the strategical value

of a cavalry division is diminished, if it proceed so far as to be unable to communicate with the army during the day.

I gave you my ideas on raids in my "Letters on Cavalry." You were very annoyed at the time, because I attached so little value to those "quick and merry rides" which were so much talked about in the American War of Secession. The above-mentioned case confirms the opinion I expressed then. A raid, i.e. a mass of cavalry detached to such a distance from its army as to render daily communication and transmission of orders and reports impossible is advisable in isolated cases, when the cavalry has to perform some special task. Thus the ride of the 17th Hussars to the vicinity of Montmédy for the purpose of destroying the railway, may be called a raid. The cavalry which on the 26th destroyed the railway near Payns, between Troyes and Mery-sur-Seine, likewise carried out such a raid. This far-reaching activity of the German cavalry, which at this time covered the country from Paynes to Montmédy, i.e. 128 miles in a straight line, seemed to me most worthy of admiration.

On the other hand, if we had sent a division into the heart of the enemy's country with general instructions to damage the enemy as much as possible, it might, in the end, have been cut off from its own army by hostile troops, without finding out where it might act to greatest advantage. It could not have sent timely reports, for its lines of relays would have been severed by the enemy, and, in order to possess more than mere historical value, reports must arrive quickly and in good time. The cavalry would have been lucky to escape destruction and return to the army after suffering more or less loss; the ultimate question would then be whether the damage inflicted on the enemy compensated for the losses incurred. It is very probable that the absence of the division would have been painfully felt

somewhere in connection with the army. No army possesses more than enough of this valuable branch of the service, not even the Germans in 1870, notwithstanding the feeble opposition of that of the enemy.

While the cavalry of the German Armies thus regained touch with the enemy which had been lost since the battle of Woerth because the enemy by using the railroads could move faster than the pursuer, and because the Third Army had to be halted during the events near Metz, the army corps carried out the marches ordered without being molested by the enemy.

The Headquarters of the Meuse Army was transferred to Clermont (the Royal Headquarters were at the same place).

The XII. Corps marched to Varennes, Bauluy and Apremont, the combined Brigade which had been left before Verdun, to Montfaucon, leaving one squadron at Nixéville.

The Guard Corps reached Dombasle and vicinity.

The IV. Corps Fleury and Ippécourt.

The Headquarters of the Third Army was transferred to Revigny-aux-Vaches as previously stated.

The two Bavarian corps marched northward behind the Meuse Army, to Erize-la-Petite and Triaucourt.

The 9th Division of the V. Corps reached Vanauld-les-Dames and Vanauld-le-Chatel, the remainder of the corps and the Wurttemberg Division halted at Heiltz and Sermaize.

The XI. Corps marched to Heiltz-l'Evêque, advance guard to St. Lumier and Bassuet.

The VI. Corps was reinforced at Thieblemont by those troops which had been left before Toul and Pfalzburg.

These marches, however, were not carried out every-

where without difficulties. The latter were caused by the fact that the whole operation had to be directed by a hasty counter-order, which was issued very late to some of the troops. This will be best illustrated by the particulars of what I witnessed with the Guard Corps.

Early in the morning orders were received at Triaucourt to halt until further orders were received. But the troops had been on the move since 6 a.m. The aides-de-camp of the general commanding were, however, sent in all directions to give the order. Still the fact of its reaching a division does not immediately bring the latter to a halt. We know that the column of route of a division is more than 4 miles long, and that on the night of the 25th-26th the cantonments of both divisions had a depth of over 7 miles. The commander does not march at the head of the advance guard, his place is at the head of the main body. He must therefore send word to the advance guard, and the leader of the latter to the point. Thus it happened that the troops had marched a considerable distance before they received the order to halt. The 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard, which was in cantonments from Brizeaux to Beauzée, probably passed Passavant with its leading troops in obedience to the former disposition. The 1st Infantry Division of the Guard from their cantonments between Esclaires and Vaubécourt, had probably marched a considerable distance beyond Le Chemin in the direction of Vieil Dampierre and on the hill roads of the Bois de Belval.

In the course of the morning a general staff officer brought the disposition of the Meuse Army and explained the general situation to the corps commander by word of mouth. The Guard Corps was to march to Dombasle on two roads, north-east of the present position of the divisions, the distance being over 21 miles. The greatest haste was necessary as the IV. Corps was to move to Fleury and Ippécourt, crossing on its way from Lahey-court (from the south), the roads running east and west,

which had been assigned to the Divisions of the Guard, and they in turn were to make room for the Bavarian Corps which was to reach Triaucourt on the same day. For this reason the Meuse Army ordered the Guard Corps to march in two columns.

At 9.15 a.m. the orders were hurriedly dictated from the map (because the Guard Corps was to march off not later than 11 a.m.), there was therefore no time to ascertain whether the communications shown on the map were practicable or not.

According to the disposition the Cavalry Division of the Guard was to march through Futeau and Les Islettes to Recicourt, the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard through Brizeaux, Beaulieu and Clermont to Dombasle, the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard through Waly, Lavoye and Ville-sur-Consance to Jouy-en-Argonne, having first reconnoitred the road from Rampont. The Corps Artillery was ordered to move through Vaubécourt and then to march to Brocourt behind the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard. The transport and ammunition columns were ordered to march through Beauzée to St. André. Those troops who could not find shelter in the villages were to bivouac. The 2nd Division of the Guard was to throw out outposts towards Verdun in place of the brigade of the XII. Corps which now marched away, the men's packs were to be taken off and carried on requisitioned carts and guarded by the footsore. Careful arrangements were to be made that the baggage wagons, and those carrying the knapsacks should not interfere with or delay the march of the troops, especially the IV. Corps approaching from the south.

In these arrangements you perceive the desire to use three parallel roads to make room for the IV. Corps as quickly as possible. It was not until east of Clermont that the Cavalry Division of the Guard was to use the road assigned to the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard. It was calculated that the cavalry would march more

rapidly and would have cleared the road before it was wanted by the 1st Infantry Division.

Perhaps you will notice that the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard was directed to reconnoitre beforehand the route from Rampont to Jouy. There was no road shown on the map. In fact, as it turned out afterwards, there was no communication by road at all, and the Division was obliged to make a considerable detour.

You also see that the order was given to carry the knapsacks on requisitioned carts in order to relieve the troops during the ensuing forced marches. We shall see later on what is to be said against this arrangement, which is of the utmost strategical importance because it affects the efficiency of the troops on the march. In this case the infantry of the Guard did not see their packs again until a week later, after the battle of Sedan.

So far as I remember, the troops cooked at the place where the order to halt reached them, and commenced their march in the new direction at 11 a.m. The corps commander and his staff started at 1.30 p.m., and we reckoned on overtaking the troops on the march as we had invariably done hitherto. We were greatly surprised, however, to find no one on the road which leads from Waly to the high-road on which we intended to ride to Dombasle through Clermont so as to find if possible both divisions on the march. At the time when the orders were issued, various opinions had been expressed as to the practicability of the roads. The photo-lithographed map at our disposal was very indistinct. We felt somewhat afraid lest the troops might find some of the roads impracticable which had been assigned to them. Our marches had hitherto been invariably reconnoitred by the cavalry far to our front, but now we were marching on unknown cross-roads. Our apprehensions in this respect were not allayed when we saw Beaulieu, situated on a rocky summit of the Argonnes very picturesque for an enthusiastic admirer of nature,

but terrible for troops on the march. The whole 1st Division of the Guard had been ordered to march over this rock! Why did they not turn aside and march through Waly? Our only consolation was that its experienced commander would know how to help himself. But where could the other Infantry Division be? We were overtaken at Waly by a heavy rain. The whole of the headquarters staff took refuge, mounted, under the projecting roof of the village inn, until the storm had passed over. The Corps Artillery passed us at a brisk trot, so we had found at least a part of our troops! The officer commanding reported that he had seen nothing of the 2nd Infantry Division which he had been ordered to follow; that the road to Jubécourt and Brocourt was clear and in good condition, and that he would reach his destination in good time. After the storm had passed, we resumed our march much depressed with the thought that touch with our troops should have been lost, though only for a few hours. Although the distance of the enemy and the presence of our cavalry between him and us rendered it impossible that the troops should become engaged to-day, still everyone felt the awkwardness of our situation. We met a stranger near Clermont in a great state of excitement who brought some amusement into this general depression. He came to meet us as fast as he could walk, and implored the Prince of Wurtemberg, by everything he held holy, not to ride further, because Clermont was in the midst of a very heavy infantry fire. We rode on quietly and found near the town the bivouac of a supply column of the XII. Corps. It was afterwards asserted that the stranger had heard a soldier's ears being boxed, contrary to regulations, and had mistaken this for infantry fire. But the hilarity thus caused did not last long. We counted on finding the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard between Clermont and Dombasle. But the beautiful high-road, which during the last 2 miles ran along a charming valley, was found

to be quite clear towards evening! We only saw, north of Recicourt, the bivouac of the Cavalry Division of the Guard. Where were the two Infantry Divisions?

It began to get dark as we entered Dombasle. Late in the evening reports were brought by the officers who had been sent to receive the orders. The 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard had turned north from the road Brizeaux-Beauzée, and as the Corps Artillery was 7 miles further south, the latter had failed to overtake them, as its road from Jubécourt to Brocourt turned off from the route followed by the Division. The Division, as previously stated, found no communication by road between Rampont and Jouy and had to make a long detour. I do not remember now which road it did take, but the last troops arrived at their bivouacs and cantonments at 11 p.m.

The 1st Infantry Division of the Guard had found the steep rocky paths of Beaulieu impassable, especially for horses and wagons. It had to look for other roads and turned off to the west, in order not to interfere with other troops. After a fatiguing march on by-roads through the passes of the Argonnes, and then Futeau and Les Islettes, the Division passed Clermont at night, where it had the honour to defile before His Majesty the King. Its last troops reached their bivouacs at 3 a.m. All went well with the men as far as Clermont; their spirits were once more raised by the sight of their venerated sovereign, but between Clermont and Dombasle the tired and weary fell out by the roadside in alarming numbers.

The Corps Artillery reached its destination several hours before the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard, which was to cover the troops against Verdun. The squadron of the XII. Corps, which had remained at Nixéville, observed the fortress, but could not do so from all sides. Perhaps it also marched away when the troops of the Guard Corps were seen arriving. The Corps Artillery found the inhabitants very insolent after

the departure of the XII. Corps, and were obliged to send out picquets and patrols of mounted men of the horse artillery towards Verdun to avoid surprise until the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard arrived.

This was certainly a very extraordinary situation! Even in Dombasle the inhabitants were suspicious and disobliging to the headquarters staff, until the arrival of our infantry made them more friendly. My host, a priest, was going to place us officers in such a position that he could lock us up during the night. We made a slight alteration in his plans and locked him up, assuring him that we would be responsible for his safety.

If you wish me to express an opinion about these events and the exhaustion of the Guard Corps, I must confess that I do not see how the headquarters could have avoided the difficulties which arose. They were the consequences of a counter-order and an indistinct map. If a counter-order is unavoidable, as in this case, ill-luck may then bring such things to pass, and they must be put up with as well as may be. Wherever counter-orders can possibly be avoided, they should not be issued. You can clearly see by the events of the 26th of August what confusion must have been produced in Gyulai's army on the 9th May, 1859, by the four unnecessary counter-orders which he issued.

The other corps must also have endured great exertions the 26th August. The IV. Corps could not have arrived at Fleury and Ippécourt until very late. Of the two Bavarian corps, the Official Account states that, like the Guard Corps, they reached their destinations after exhausting marches, portions of them not till the next morning.

I have now only to recapitulate what happened in the French Army on the 26th August. In doing so I shall follow the Official Account.

The French Army wheeled to the right, pivoting on the 7th Corps at Vouziers. (On the day before it had

executed a wheel to the left.) Margueritte's Cavalry Division advanced to Oches, the 5th Corps to Le Chesne, the 1st Corps to Semuy, Bonnemain's Cavalry Division to Attigny, the 12th Corps and Commander-in-Chief (MacMahon) to Tourteron. As the corps nearest the enemy remained in the same position, and the other corps advanced only 9, or at the most 11 miles without approaching those which had halted, the whole movement bears the stamp of the reluctance with which the Commander-in-Chief accepted the order to move in an easterly direction, forced upon him against his better judgment by the Government at Paris. If I were to discuss the employment of the two Cavalry Divisions, of which one was left in rear of the Army, while the other was thrown out in front of the perfectly safe left wing, I should have to repeat my remarks on the 25th of August. General Douay, commanding the 7th Corps, felt obliged to cover the army in the direction of the Germans, and posted his main forces at the junction of the roads to Grand Pré and Buzancy. He sent Bordas's Brigade to these two places and a cavalry regiment towards Olizy and Monthois, west of the Argonnes, and another advanced on the road to Varennes and Buzancy.

These were the troops which had been observed by the advanced parties of the German cavalry. The latter in turn had been observed by the French and caused considerable commotion among them, though none of these parties was stronger than a squadron. General Bordas withdrew his troops from Grand Pré to the Bois de Bourgogne, immediately north of the same, and reported to General Douay that he was retiring from Grand Pré before superior hostile forces; at the same time the appearance of the Saxon squadron at Buzancy caused the troops there to retire to Vouziers, and to report a spirited engagement. The cavalry regiment, detached south of Vouziers towards Monthois, reported the presence of a strong detachment of Uhlans at the latter place. General

Douay now believed that the whole hostile army was in his front, and that Grand Pré was occupied by the enemy. He decided, therefore, to await attack in a position near Vouziers between Chestres and Falaise. He caused the position to be fortified, and waited there all night in a pouring rain for the hostile advance. He also sent General Dumont with the other brigade of his Division to meet Bordas and cover his retreat. The latter had in the meantime found out that only German cavalry detachments were in front of Grand Pré; he then reoccupied the town, capturing a patrol of Prussian hussars. Dumont nevertheless, according to his instructions, ordered him to retire, and marched back to Vouziers with the whole division in the early morning. The last report from Bordas of his reoccupation of Grand Pré had not yet arrived. On the contrary, Douay had reported to MacMahon that the enemy had occupied Grand Pré, adding, that he expected to be attacked at any time. This report arrived at Tournai late at night and MacMahon resolved to move with the entire army to Vouziers and Buzancy on the 27th. The events of the day may thus be summed up: The 7th Corps, disturbed by a few advanced parties of cavalry, exhausted its troops partly by keeping them in readiness for battle in a pouring rain, partly by marching them to and fro, by orders and counter-orders, even throughout the night, and the rest of the army made an insignificant movement to the east.

The commotion in the 7th Corps seems at first sight to call for sharp criticism. To me, however, it seems quite easily explained as the natural consequence of the whole strategical situation. The 7th Corps missed the presence of the cavalry divisions in front and sought to cover itself by sending mixed detachments to Grand Pré and Buzancy, using half of the cavalry for that purpose. The conviction, however, that the enemy had much greater numbers of cavalry available, the consciousness that their own cavalry masses had been despatched in a

direction where no enemy could be met, caused an uneasiness which should not be blamed too severely. When uneasiness has once got hold of men's minds, it will not be long before they conjure up the most terrifying apparitions. The non-arrival of an important report (such as that of the reoccupation of Grand Pré by Bordas) will complete the erroneous conception of the situation. The French had learned from Weissenburg that a detached infantry division is in a perilous situation unless it be covered by a screen of cavalry a day's march in front. Douay's brother had lost his life there. He, therefore, felt insecure with the small number of cavalry belonging to his Corps. A feeling of uncertainty and insecurity is bound to increase the belief in imminent danger. Hence the useless and exhausting readiness throughout the night, hence the marches and counter-marches, hence the incorrect report of the occupation of Grand Pré by the Germans and of an attack to be expected at any moment.

What do we learn from this? That a body of infantry cannot give strategical cover if it be detached so far to the front that in case of attack it cannot receive timely support from the main body of the army. A body of infantry can only be said to be completely covered, and in safety, when the cavalry scouts are so far to the front that a report of the enemy's approach arrives before he can close to within a day's march. To detach bodies of infantry to a great distance does not cover an army, but endangers the detachment. Such detachments you must, however, not place in the same category as the sending out of an advance guard. In discussing the engagement at Saalfeld I explained how the distance of the advanced guard is in direct proportion to its strength and to the possibility of its being supported by the main body.

TWENTY-SEVENTH LETTER.

THE 27TH AUGUST.

ON the evening of the 26th August, when the German Supreme Command at Clermont had to decide the movements for the 27th, the most important of the cavalry reports, of which I spoke in my last letter, had not yet been forwarded. Indeed the reports of 1st Lieut. von Werthern and of Sergeant Brohmann, who had observed the 7th French Corps in their position at Vouziers, did not arrive until 5 a.m. and 5 p.m. respectively on the 27th. The report of Captain von Klenck, however, confirmed the fact that on the afternoon of the 26th hostile troops of all arms had been at Grand Pré, and this made the contemplated advance of MacMahon towards Metz almost a certainty. On the other hand it was important to know that the enemy had not yet reached the line of the Meuse at Dun. Based on this report the Royal Headquarters ordered at 11 p.m. the continuation of the movement by which seven corps were to be concentrated in the vicinity of Damvillers. The commander of the Meuse Army, who happened to be at Clermont, received verbal orders to that effect. He was directed to seize the passages of the Maas at Dun and Stenay, and to outflank with the cavalry the enemy's right on his march eastwards. The two Bavarian Corps received direct orders from Headquarters to follow the Meuse Army to Nixéville and Dombasle. The commander of the Third Army was informed of the measures adopted, and directed to continue his movement on St. Meneshould with the remaining

troops. At noon orders had been despatched from Bar-le-Duc to the Army investing Metz, to move two corps toward Damvillers, so as to reach Briey and Etain on the 27th. This order was repeated by telegraph, as communication by wire had now been established as far as Erize-la-Petite.

It is of course of the utmost importance that telegraphic communication be established as soon as possible. Whilst discussing the campaign of 1859 I pointed out how important it is on the other hand to forward written duplicates of the telegraphic orders and reports, in order to prevent or rectify as quickly as possible any misunderstandings that might be caused in transmission by wire. Here the telegraphic communication was subsequent to the written order because the telegraph could not be used sooner, and it was of great value because Prince Frederick Charles was able to issue orders for the march of those two corps several hours earlier. But it was a general principle in the German Army, laid down in Army orders, that in every case written duplicates of all telegrams should be sent. (I can find nothing to that effect in Bronsart's work, but I know that this order was issued in 1870.) When the telegraph is not too busy, telegrams may be ordered to be repeated in order to avoid misunderstandings in this way.

During the night of the 26th the dispositions of the Meuse Army were issued in accordance with the orders received. The 6th Cavalry Division was ordered to advance on Vouziers, the 5th on Grand Pré, the Cavalry Division of the Guard on Sommerance, that of the XII. Corps on Varennes and Dun. In rear of this screen of nearly 100 squadrons the XII. Corps was to march from Varennes to Dun, to cross the Meuse at that point and to occupy the bridge there as well as that of Stenay, fronting to the west. The Guard Corps was to march to Montfaucon, the IV. to the country west of Verdun. The two last-named corps were instructed to throw the requisite

bridges over the Meuse on the same day. This movement of the corps re-established the former order. The XII. Corps regained its position on the right of the Meuse Army by a flank march from Varennes to Dun in touch with the enemy. A surprise on the march on this day was improbable, because the cavalry was reconnoitring the country towards the north a day's march in advance. On the other hand the flank march was an unavoidable necessity, if Dun and Stenay were to be reached on this day. All the other Corps were much farther from these places than the XII. Corps.

Let us now see what happened on this day with the advanced cavalry.

The Cavalry Division of the XII. Corps had thrown out one brigade to Landres, the other to Rémonville; the latter sent one regiment north to the road Buzancy-Stenay, and the other with a battery towards Buzancy. The advance guard of the latter reported at 11 a.m. that a hostile cavalry regiment was in its front and that the town was held by the enemy. The other regiment had meanwhile returned to Rémonville, and the united brigade under General Senfft von Pilsach advanced *vid* Bayonville. By order of the General the advance guard of three troops charged two squadrons of Chasseurs on this side of the town and drove them back into the same; the advance guard was received with carbine fire and driven out of the town again by superior numbers after a hand-to-hand fight. The pursuing Chasseurs were taken in flank by the leading squadron of Senfft's brigade and driven back into the town, carbine fire again rendering further pursuit impossible. The brigade took up a position south of Buzancy on the heights of Sivry in order to charge the enemy should he attempt to leave Buzancy, which was now being shelled. The hostile cavalry retired so rapidly, that the pursuing Uhlans could not overtake it (1 p.m.).

This probably astonished the brigade, because they could see superior cavalry on the further side of Buzancy, and large numbers of infantry and artillery at Bar; all these troops were retiring in the direction of Briulles. The presence of these large hostile forces was the reason why the brigade could not force its way through Buzancy, and had to rest content with preventing the enemy's retreat from the south of the town. Meanwhile the above-mentioned patrol to Beaumont had reported that it had encountered hostile cavalry at that place at 4 a.m. and had been pursued by it to south of Buzancy. The commander of the XII. Corps thereupon ordered the whole Cavalry Division to advance on Nouart, because the distance from Beaumont to Stenay, the destination of the advance guard of the corps, is only 7 miles. After Senfft's brigade had been relieved in its position south of Buzancy at 5 p.m. by a brigade of the 5th Cavalry Division, the 12th Cavalry Division advanced in the evening to Nouart, Tailly, Villers-devant-Dun and Barricourt. The Headquarters of the Meuse Army ordered the Cavalry Division of the Guard to march to Rémonville, throwing out the Uhlan Brigade as an advance guard to Bayonville. The 5th Cavalry Division received a report early in the morning, that the enemy had left Grand Pré, that a patrol, pushed forward to Vouziers, had observed the retirement of hostile detachments from Grand Pré to Vouziers, and that shots had been fired from this side of the latter town. Grand Pré was now occupied by a cavalry brigade whose advanced parties followed the enemy and reported large numbers at Vouziers; the two remaining brigades of the Division advanced on Buzancy; one of them (the 13th) relieved Senfft's Brigade in front of Buzancy, the other went into quarters at Champigneulle. The 6th Cavalry Division had reported before its departure that the inhabitants stated that large bodies had marched from Reims to Rethel some days before. The Division bivouacked at Monthois and pushed detachments and

advanced parties to Savigny, St. Morel and Semide. The patrols reported a hostile army corps at Vouziers and a brigade at Blaize. The divisional commander reported from his own observation, that probably more than one corps was assembled at Vouziers. On the same day the 4th Cavalry Division moved to Souain, north of Suippe, the 2nd to Coole, west of Vitry.

The corps carried out the movements ordered. The XII. Corps crossed the Meuse at Dun (where it remained) and threw out an advance guard of one brigade with artillery and cavalry to Stenay (almost 25 miles, a very exhausting forced march), which was reached at 3 p.m. The patrol which was to reconnoitre from Stenay to Beaumont, proceeded by mistake in the direction of Beaufort. The Guard Corps reached Montfaucon, the IV. Corps Germonville and Fromeréville (both corps made or secured two passages over the Meuse in the direction of Damvillers); the two Bavarian Corps reached Nixéville and Dombasle by a march which began in the afternoon and lasted until midnight, the V. Corps reached Daucourt, Sivry and St. Menehould, the XI. Corps La Neuville, Givry, Epense and Dommartin, the Wurtembergers Vieil Dampierre and the VI. Corps Charmont. The Royal Headquarters reached Clermont, the headquarters of the Meuse Army Malancourt, that of the Third Army Revigny. One of the two corps detached from the army investing Metz reached Briey, the other Etain, on this date.

The summary of the reports received on the 27th August showed that the enemy had not reached the Meuse on that day, that at least one Army Corps was still at Vouziers, 27 miles from the river, that others must have reached Briulles and Le Chesne, 14 miles from the Maas, in the evening, that these latter were moving to the north-west, and that the enemy's movements to the north-east had for some reason come to a stop. Only the advanced

cavalry had reached Beaumont. If you compare this summary of the reports rendered by the German cavalry with the actual situation and position of the opposing forces as shown by the sketch in the Official Account, you will recognize that the Supreme Command was as accurately informed about the hostile army as was necessary for issuing the dispositions for the 28th August. Marshal MacMahon, on the other hand, had very little information about the German forces.

This difference of information about the enemy again resulted from the different employment of the cavalry. I shall revert to this later on even at the risk of repeating myself. But the 27th August invites another discussion about organization.

The French Corps, quartered at Bar and Buzancy at noon, had a whole cavalry division at its disposal. This Division, numerically twice as strong as Senfft's Brigade, did not attack the latter, but allowed its advance guard to be twice driven into Buzancy, although a whole army corps was in support at Bar. It permitted Senfft's brigade to observe all the movements of the Corps. The French cavalry of 1870 cannot be accused of want of nerve. Their bravery has been sufficiently shown at Woerth, Vionville and Sedan. What then was the cause of its inaction? It can, I think, be easily explained. The Cavalry Division belonged to the 5th Corps. The latter received orders to retire in the direction of Le Chesne just as the advanced parties of the cavalry came into collision with each other. The Cavalry Division was probably ordered to cover this retreat and then to follow the main body. If I have to cover a retreat, I do not attack, but think myself lucky if the enemy does not attack me. Hence the apparent want of decision on the part of this Cavalry Division is simply the result of its being placed under the orders of the Army Corps. Had the division received its orders direct from the Army Headquarters to reconnoitre to the south of Buzancy, Senfft's Brigade

would have been driven back until superior forces were encountered. In that case the commanding heights of Sivry would certainly have been reached, and the enemy would have been observed (whether the Corps advanced, retired or halted would have made no difference). The action of this Cavalry Division therefore appears to me to be the natural sequence of making it an integral part of an army corps, as it was obliged to conform more closely to the movements of the latter than if it had received its orders directly from Army Headquarters.

It is true that in the German armies there were also cavalry divisions allotted to various army corps, and that a brigade of one of these divisions was opposed to the French cavalry at Buzancy on the 27th August. But you must remember that all the cavalry divisions of the Meuse Army were considered on this day as subordinate to Headquarters only, and they received orders accordingly. On the same day the Cavalry of the Guard was ordered to replace the Cavalry Division of the XII. Corps, which had been sent on to Nouart, by advancing from Sommerance to Rémonville. The question as to whether it is better to place the cavalry division under the direct orders of the Army Headquarters or to place it under the orders of an army corps, the pros and cons of which have often been discussed, without being exhausted, has had fresh light thrown upon it by the events of the 27th August.

Brahaut's Cavalry Division at Buzancy certainly constituted that cavalry which is indispensable for infantry, for no body of infantry can be left without cavalry altogether. For this purpose we have in the German Army the divisional cavalry of one regiment to each infantry division; in the Austrian Army the brigade cavalry of one squadron to each brigade. The excessive proportion of cavalry in the French infantry organizations greatly impaired the efficiency of their reconnaissances.

If the French Army had placed as much weight on the effectiveness of independent cavalry divisions as the Ger-

mans did, the cavalry attached to infantry would have been limited to a similar degree, and each division would only have had two squadrons, or each corps one regiment, of cavalry. MacMahon's Army consisted of 112 squadrons and 13 infantry divisions. If only two squadrons had been attached to each of the latter, 86 squadrons would have remained available for independent cavalry divisions, and four such divisions of 20 or more squadrons each would have been opposed to the Meuse Army.

The fact that the cavalry division which was seen at Beaumont early on the 27th did not patrol towards Stenay, only 7 miles away, and thus failed to ascertain the arrival there of the advance guard of the German XII. Corps, proves that in those days the French cavalry did not attach the proper weight to officer's patrols. The division probably contented itself with posting the regulation outposts without separating the duties of obtaining information from those of security. Remember what I have written before on this subject ; the 27th August demonstrates the great strategical value of cavalry reconnaissance.

On the other hand the patrol, sent by the advance guard brigade of the XII. Corps from Stenay, in the direction of Beaumont, rode to Beaufort by mistake, and therefore did not report the enemy at Beaumont, only 7 miles away. This is an additional and interesting proof of the importance of the strictest system in the preparation and giving of orders, more particularly where the names of places are concerned. We deduce the same maxim, which I pointed out in my last letter on the action of the cavalry on the 26th August, that where a reconnaissance is of special importance, a single patrol is not sufficient, and that at least two should be despatched each on a separate road towards the same object. In this case the reconnaissance of Beaumont was of special importance, because the position on the right bank of the Meuse was unfavourable, being commanded by the opposite bank, and because the river was very shallow. It was

therefore all the more important for the brigade at Stenay not to be suddenly attacked from Beaumont. At the same time a reconnaissance to Beaufort and Nouart was also expedient. After the experience gained we ought to have sent two patrols towards Beaumont and two beyond Beaufort to Nouart, each patrol on a separate road. If a Belgian traveller, who happened to have come from Beaumont, had not reported the presence there of a French cavalry division and of 80-100,000 men at Le Chesne and Buzancy, the advance guard would have remained in ignorance of the enemy's neighbourhood until this information had been received from its own corps, i.e. from the rear. But the corps expects to learn such matters through its advance guard. I will mention, incidentally, my surprise that the French with their propensity to suspect a spy in every individual, allowed this Belgian to pass from Beaumont to Stenay. It simply proves that the French did not apprehend the presence of German troops at Stenay.

In turning to the events at the headquarters of the Guard Corps I must tell you first of all, that no orders had been received from Army Headquarters, and since the officers sent from the various units to receive orders at Corps Headquarters reported that many of the troops would not reach their destination before midnight, orders were issued on the evening of the 26th directing the troops to cook and eat their meals in their bivouacs on the morning of the 27th and to be in readiness to march by 11 a.m. But early on the morning of the 27th August orders arrived from the headquarters of the Meuse Army to march at a much earlier hour. We thought it very hard that the troops which had not reached their bivouacs until 3 a.m., should have to move off again not later than 8 a.m. According to my present view of the situation this was absolutely necessary in order to allow

the concentration of seven corps on the line Damvillers-Mangiennes on the 28th August, for which purpose the IV. Corps had to march on the 27th over the ground occupied by the Guard Corps, and the two Bavarian corps were to halt there. The latter had not even reached their bivouacs at Dombasle and Nixéville before midnight. I then resolved, therefore, never again to allow myself to find fault with the measures of my superiors in time of war, until I have at some subsequent period learnt all the motives that prompted them. Even then there was no doubt either in my mind or any one else's in the Guard Corps, that the orders had to be carried out. But many a one thought to himself—and I cannot quite acquit myself either—that such hurry was not necessary and that the troops might have been allowed a few more hours of rest. This thought was improper, even if not uttered. It makes no difference in war whether death for your country is caused by a bullet or by exhaustion, when it comes to “forward at any cost!” The Corps was in that situation, only we subordinates did not know it. There was no time to prove and convince us of the fact.

The corps commander directed the Cavalry Division of the Guard to march to Avocourt and Ivoiry and wait there till the XII. Corps had passed, then to advance to Sommerance, push forward toward Grand Pré and establish communication with the Saxon and 5th Cavalry Divisions by way of Landres and Grand Pré respectively; the horse artillery was to be attached to the cavalry. The 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard was ordered to march through Montzéville and Malancourt to Montfaucon, the Corps Artillery, accompanied by the light field bridging train, to Dombasle and to follow thence the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard. The 1st Infantry Division of the Guard was to wait in its bivouacs until the Corps Artillery had passed and then to follow on the same road to Montfaucon. The Cavalry Division and the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard were to march at

6 a.m., the Corps Artillery at 7 a.m., the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard at 8 a.m.

The ammunition and transport columns were ordered to proceed to Dombasle by way of Ippécourt, Jubécourt and Rampont, and warned not to cross the IV. Corps, which was using the road Fleury-Nixéville. The ammunition column were given permission to avail themselves of any means to hasten their march.

The cavalry received merely general instructions, because it had to let the XII. Corps pass. It would have been a very grave matter to delay the march of the XII. Corps to Dun, for it was much more important that this corps should reach the Meuse as early as possible, than that the Cavalry of the Guard should proceed to the north where the 12th and 5th Divisions were already reconnoitring and covering the flank march of the XII. Corps.

In these orders it may appear unusual to you, that the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard, although nearest the object of the march, was to bring up the rear, and follow the 2nd Division and Corps Artillery. The reason was, that the 1st Division was the last to reach its quarters (3 a.m.) and that the Guard Corps had to clear the southern districts first for the corps following it.

In this instance, the arrangements for the transport and ammunition columns caused great difficulty. Their road from St. André to Jubécourt crossed at Ippécourt the road Fleury-Nixéville which the IV. Corps had to take. It was therefore of the utmost importance that the columns should trot past this crossing before the arrival there of the IV. Corps, to prevent our being cut off from our supply columns, perhaps for a long time, by the IV. Corps. The measures to be adopted for the acceleration of the march allowed the escort to ride on the wagons of the ammunition columns, which is otherwise forbidden. There was no time to arrange matters with the IV. Corps, for the orders did not reach that Corps at Dombasle

until early in the morning and then St. André was nine and a half miles away. You can see quite plainly by these measures, how many things have to be considered in the preparation of a single march disposition, whenever there is the least divergence from the ordinary course of events. A flank march had to be executed and no interference on the part of the enemy was to be apprehended. Yet how difficult it was to prepare the disposition so as to avoid confusion! At the same time the utmost speed was necessary, especially for the more distant bodies, the ammunition columns and trains. A staff officer must be able to write or dictate such dispositions in the midst of the noise and the other business of his office set up in a farm house, he may be interrupted ten times by inquiries and reports which he cannot decline to receive until he has convinced himself that they are not urgent. If he make the least mistake in calculating the marches or spelling the names, inconvenience, confusion and friction (of which we have quoted so many instances) will result therefrom, and the critics will say later on, that it is inconceivable how such things should have happened. You see that the detail arrangements of strategy, the elementary work of the general staff, are sometimes extremely difficult to manage, and it is well worth while to give them your fullest attention.

Having issued the dispositions for the march the General and staff started at 8 a.m. and accompanied the troops who marched in column of sections over the stubble fields on either side of the road for the greater part of the way. The men were terribly fatigued, especially those of the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard who had endured the greatest hardships. It was a good test of the spirit of our officers and non-commissioned officers. I saw many an officer carrying two rifles belonging to exhausted men in order that they might not straggle, and many a non-commissioned officer with another rifle besides his own.

The march was not long (a little over 9 miles), the weather cool and pleasant after the heavy rain of the day before. Yet many men fell out by the roadside tired out as they were by the march of the previous day which had only been completed at 3 a.m.

Orders were issued during the march for the three horse batteries of the Corps Artillery to join the Cavalry Division of the Guard at Ivoiry, west of Monthois. Up to this time the Cavalry Division of the Guard had been left without artillery (since the 23rd August) because its duty was that of reconnaissance and observation. From to-day the cavalry divisions were, if possible, to attack the right flank of the enemy on his march eastward, as laid down in headquarters orders. They might possibly have to fight in order to bring the enemy to a halt, to molest him on the march or to "hold" him. Artillery was necessary for this purpose. The Guard Corps made use of the fact that the Cavalry Division was part of its organization and provided it plentifully with artillery (no other cavalry division had three batteries). These batteries remained with the cavalry up to the battle of Sedan. You will see later on in that battle that the horse batteries were employed with the Corps Artillery. I again mention this point, because it is one of the few that can be quoted in favour of placing the cavalry divisions under the orders of the army corps, while most of the other arguments justify their being placed under the direct orders of the commander of the army.

Our march led us past Malancourt, to which place the headquarters of the Meuse Army was transferred. There, I believe, I am not quite sure, the Guard Corps received its orders for the night. On arrival at Montfaucon, if I remember right, the Chief of the Staff of the Corps dictated, on the open field, without dismounting, the disposition for the positions to be occupied during the coming night. The Cavalry Division of the Guard with the three horse batteries

were directed to advance on Rémonville and Landres, the 2nd Infantry Division was to bivouac south-west of Montfaucon in rear of the road Varennes-Montfaucon, the advance guard as far as the line Charpentry-Epinonville, one battalion at the "Chapelle des Malades"¹ to cover the light field bridge train and march with the latter on the same afternoon to throw a bridge across the Meuse under the supervision of Lieut.-Colonel von Wangenheim.² The 1st Infantry Division of the Guard was to bivouac near Septsarges, its advance guard on the line Cierges-Nantillois-Dannevoux. The Corps Artillery was directed to Cuisy. The ammunition columns were to march, during the night if necessary, to Malancourt or Béthincourt. The headquarters of the Corps was established at Montfaucon.

I invite your attention to the fact that the ammunition columns were brought very close up to the Corps by this disposition, because it was feared they might be cut off from the Guard by the IV. Corps, and because an engagement might take place the next day, if the enemy should continue his eastward movement.

The line of outposts was decided from the map without reconnoitring the country. In no other manner would the troops be enabled to post their outposts by daylight and gain time for necessary rest (see the Field Service Regulations). In arranging the details of the outposts the best must be made of the circumstances. The theory of regulating the position of the outposts by the nature of the ground is quite wrong, for there is no time to do so with large masses of troops. (Strategy and tactics overlap here.)

The disposition was dictated with the utmost speed in order that the exhausted troops might get their rest as soon as possible, yet hardly one syllable can be taken exception

¹ The Chapelle des Malades lies south-east of Montfaucon, but so near that it could not be shown on the sketch.

² The bridge was thrown across the Meuse at Dannevoux.

to. That is the outcome of a proper routine in strategy, which should be well studied and learnt.

You are perhaps surprised that a battalion of the 2nd Division was ordered to cover the construction of the bridge, which actually took place within the sphere of the outposts of the 1st Division. This was on account of the exhaustion of the 1st Division.

Montfaucon is situated on a rock, apparently of volcanic origin, and affords a view for miles over the undulating neighbourhood. The roads lead up to the town in zig-zag with a steep gradient. The town apparently owes its origin to the times of mediæval marauders, for no one would think of building a town to-day on this bleak rock instead of in the fertile plain below with no impediments to communication in any direction, not even ditches along the roads, so that the rock of Montfaucon may be avoided by troops and vehicles on all sides and in every direction without any delay. Yet on entering this nest in the rocks we found that all the troops ordered to march by way of Montfaucon had painfully climbed up the rock and down again, instead of passing round it in comfort. In Montfaucon the roads cross, especially that of Dombasle-Nixéville-Banthéville with that of Varennes-Dombasle. The former was used by the Guard Corps, the latter by the supply and transport columns of the XII. Corps. Some other troops marched by Montfaucon by mistake and turned about in the town. The wagons and troops caused such a block and confusion in the streets that no one could move forward or back. The angry orders of our corps commander were necessary to cut the Gordian knot, though he did not exactly use his sword.

I tried to reason out what the cause of all this might be. For there were intelligent, practical and prudent men on whom the blame must fall. My first question was: "Who might have told the troops that Montfaucon was situated on a high rock and could easily be turned in the plain below?" Unless each unit marches with advanced

party in front, such a fact will not be reported. The advance guard and its point which march foremost, pay more attention to the enemy than to the convenience of the troops in rear. This would not have happened had each unit thrown out a point to the front with instructions only to preserve communication with the other troops, to report the amount of delays encountered, to examine the practicability of the communications and to propose expedients to facilitate the march. The men, however, have to be instructed in time of peace in reporting such matters. For that reason I ordered later on, when I became a divisional commander, that every body of troops, even on the daily march to and from the drill ground, should march with points thrown out to practise these duties.

At Montfaucon my quarters lay at the end of the town, so I inspected the place whilst my horses were being cared for. I found a place near the exit towards Banthéville which offered me the most beautiful view in the world. The whole country as far as Buzancy lay at my feet. I cared less, however, for scenery than for a look at the enemy. I could see plainly that there would be no collision on that day; for the bivouac fires of our outposts on the line Charpentry-Epinonville-Nantillois were kindling peacefully one after the other, and the Cavalry Division was trotting quietly past them in the direction of Landres. If the enemy did not advance from that direction during the afternoon, the troops would certainly not be molested during the coming night. The enemy, whom we knew to be at Vouziers and Grand Pré on the preceding evening, otherwise might possibly have been advancing eastward to attack us during the afternoon, which the exhaustion of the Corps would have rendered most unwelcome. It was therefore most important to know whether the Corps could be permitted to rest thoroughly during the ensuing night. A little later I conducted the Corps Commander and the Commander of

the Army to the same point from which we saw perhaps more than all our outposts in the plain below. The bright clear evening permitted everything that was going on, to be seen plainly with the telescope.

Purely strategical criticism seeks in vain for motives to justify the movements of the French Army on the 27th. Upon receipt of the erroneous report of the occupation of Grand Pré by the Germans and the impending danger of the 7th Corps at Vouziers, Marshal MacMahon ordered the 1st Corps to advance to Vouziers early in the morning to the support of the 7th Corps, and the 5th Corps to advance on Buzancy; the 12th Corps was ordered to follow the latter to Chatillon by way of Le Chesne. He received at 8 a.m. the belated news that Grand Pré was not occupied by the enemy, and that the 7th Corps was not in danger. This caused him to issue counter-orders directing all the corps to retire towards the north-west with the exception of the 7th, which remained at Vouziers. On the evening of the 27th August the whole Army stood practically in the same position as on the previous evening. Yet the Army had to endure the greatest fatigue! On the 26th August the 7th Corps had passed the whole day and the succeeding night in a defensive position ready for battle, and in hourly anticipation of an attack. Those who have been through that, know that it is more fatiguing than the severest march towards the enemy. For the constant nervous tension inseparable from the anticipation of an attack does not allow the troops a moment of rest; it impairs the *moral* of the troops, for it teaches them to be afraid. The 5th Corps had marched 14 miles from Bar to Buzancy. As soon as its advanced cavalry came in touch with the enemy, the Corps was ordered to retire again. This order caused it to retire before an insignificant force of hostile cavalry and to march back a distance of 7 miles. A march of 22 miles on a single road is alone

a considerable task for a corps. But the delays caused by the counter-orders, and the fatiguing checks increased this effort to a forced march, while the latter part of the march was a retreat with all the cares and precautions against a possible pursuit by the enemy. The 1st and 12th Corps merely advanced and retired in rear of the other corps. But they likewise marched about 19 miles, only to arrive approximately at the place which they had left in the morning, and meanwhile had suffered all the fatigues and checks caused by counter-orders. The whole Army was thus uselessly tired out on the 27th August except the two cavalry divisions, one of which made a moderate march of 14 miles to Beaumont, while the other remained at Attigny. In the evening the Army occupied a defensive position facing the German Meuse Army. In the first line were two corps (7th and 5th) at Vouziers and Brioules-sur-Bar, in the second line two corps also (1st and 12th) at Voncq and Le Chesne, a cavalry division on each flank at Beaumont and Attigny. The situation would be intelligible to the strategical critic if the French Army contemplated a continuation of its retreat to the north-west. Subsequently, however, we see that the Army resumed with determination its movement north-east on the 28th and 29th August, and mere strategical reasons fail to explain why the counter-orders of the 27th August did not assign to the corps those destinations which they reached on the 28th August, and which they might have reached on the 27th with no more exertion than their former positions in rear. It is impossible to avoid comparison with the counter-orders by which Gyulai exhausted his troops on the 9th May, because he failed to encounter an enemy in his advance toward the Dora Baltea. We found that on that occasion he allowed himself to be swayed and the leading of his army influenced by the various opinions which prevailed at headquarters.

We encounter here something similar in the leading of

the French Army. The Marshal's first care was to support the 7th Corps which had reported its situation as dangerous and that an attack at any moment might be expected. He did not wish to expose it to a catastrophe similar to that of Douay's Division at Weissenburg. He therefore supported it at once with one corps and ordered two more corps to Buzancy. From there these two corps might take the enemy in flank and rear, and defeat any movement to attack the 7th Corps in its position at Chestres-Falaise just east of Vouziers. The advance of the three corps (1st, 12th, and 5th) on the morning of the 27th August is thus explained from a strategical point of view.

But the Marshal might have assumed that the German leaders were informed of his eastward movement by this time. On the 26th August German cavalry had appeared close to several bodies of his troops. He could no longer hope to surprise the enemy by a march to the north-east. We do not know the extent of his information about the enemy at this time. But we do know that the news had reached him on the 21st August, of the investment in Metz of the Rhine Army by 200,000 Germans, that the Crown Prince of Saxony with 80,000 men was between Verdun and Metz and the Crown Prince of Prussia with 150,000 near Vitry (with his advanced cavalry), both points about 57 miles from Vouziers. Five days had passed since then and the hostile armies were advancing. Hussars belonging to the Army of the Crown Prince of Saxony had fallen into the hands of the French at Vouziers. It was therefore certain that that Army at least was in the vicinity, and might utilize the 27th August to oppose the eastward march of the French Army. Such considerations would make it clear to the Marshal that he could not unite with Bazaine without a battle, nor could he hope to receive any assistance from the latter. Though MacMahon was in communication with Montmédy, nothing was known at that place of Bazaine's

approach. Even a successful battle with the Crown Prince of Saxony would cause delay and afford the Crown Prince of Prussia time to arrive and out-flank the French Army. If you imagine yourself in MacMahon's situation such as it presented itself to him at 8 a.m. on the 27th August, you will concede that he was right in discontinuing his march eastward and in beginning a retrograde movement to the north-west as soon as he heard that the 7th Corps was not yet in danger. For a further advance towards the east, north-east or south-east, would have given the enemy the opportunity to put a rope around his neck. For the present he could not render Bazaine any assistance; but there was still time to gain the railroad Mezières-Paris by a retreat to the north-west, to secure thereby his already menaced communication with the heart of France (Paris), and at the same time to withdraw his head from the noose.

In that case, however, the retrograde movement must be continued in the direction of Mezières. Once again the regard for the Paris mob prevented the Marshal from pursuing and carrying out a rational strategy. We shall presently see among the events of the 28th August, that the fear of a revolution in Paris caused the Ministers to order the Marshal to continue vigorously his march for Bazaine's relief and thus drove him into the disaster from which he could no longer escape.

The route taken by the French corps on the 27th August must be considered, as it confirms the lessons drawn from previous events regarding the interior dispositions of marches.

The French corps were placed two and two on the same road, each corps being nearly twice as strong as a Prussian one. The latter found that they marched comfortably only when each division had a separate road. Even with that arrangement the greatest fatigue was caused as soon as the march to the right flank made it

necessary for the corps to follow in rear of each other, although they remained so far apart that one corps would approximately reach the place in the evening which the other had quitted in the morning. The ammunition and supply columns had to march during the night. Remembering all this, I can easily imagine the fatiguing and annoying checks which must have occurred on the march of the 5th and 12th French Corps from Le Chesne to Buzancy; they marched so close together as to be able to fight together on the same day if necessary. And it was during such a march as this that the counter-order was issued which caused the subsequent confusion! I cannot understand how the supply columns could have marched or what their destination could have been. But it is obvious that the troops could not have received their daily rations and they must have suffered terribly from the want of them. The complaints of the prisoners which we afterwards heard do not therefore appear to me to have been exaggerated.

It seems almost as if the French leaders had been alarmed by the disasters of the 4th and 6th August which they rightly attributed to the dispersed position of the various corps along the frontier, and that they had made up their minds to keep their armies together in masses. They fell from the error of too great dispersion into that of over-concentration. An army is incapable of making long marches in such a formation. The same cause delayed Bazaine's movements on the 14th August, and the same thing inflicted on MacMahon's army great fatigue and privations notwithstanding the small daily advance. We find here a confirmation of what I drew your attention to in discussing the campaign of 1806, that when masses of troops increase in size, a dense formation of march on a single road becomes limited, and that large bodies marching side by side afford each other better support than those marching one behind the other, which arrangement, moreover, calls for greater exertions.

The nature and extent of the limits can be calculated from the depth of the columns and the rate of march, in which only those strategists will make no mistakes who have benefited from experience. It is for this reason that our greatest living authority on strategical matters said: "The whole art consists in marching divided in order to fight united."

It would be very desirable to devote more practical work in time of peace to this art, that it may not be lost, in addition to the theoretical instruction given to the staff by the staff tours.¹

¹ Tours in which staff officers are practised theoretically in carrying out the movements of troops, making the necessary arrangements for their marches, quarters, etc.—ED.

TWENTY-EIGHTH LETTER.

THE 28TH AUGUST.

BEFORE dealing with the plans made by the Supreme Command of the German Army on the evening of the 27th August for the following day, we must consider the situation as shown at the time by the reports received, and not the actual situation represented by the sketch for the 27th August in the Official Account.

On the evening of the 27th the seven army corps (XII. Saxon, Guard, I. and II. Bavarian, II., III. and IV. Prussian), whose concentration near Mangiennes and Damvillers was contemplated for the 28th August, stood at Dun, Montfaucon, Nixéville, Dombasle, Briey, Etain and Germonville. Their destinations could have been reached on the 28th of August without great exertions, as most of them had only 14 miles to march, and two roads were available for each corps. Briey alone was 24 miles away, and the two Bavarian corps would either have had to march in rear of the Guard and IV. Corps or make a detour, amounting to a forced march, to the south of Verdun. But since the most advanced troops (cavalry) of the enemy had not yet passed Beaumont, and were thus more than 28 miles from the line Damvillers-Mangiennes, it was impossible for the latter to reach that line on the 28th. It was therefore safe to allow the three last-mentioned corps to make a shorter march on that day, and remain in reserve 5 or 10 miles in rear without thereby losing their services in the expected decisive

battle, which could not possibly take place before the 29th.

The remainder of the Third Army (three corps and the Wurttemberg Division) stood one in rear of the other with a depth of 17 miles from St. Menehould to Charmont. This part of the Army was from 38 to 57 miles from Damvillers-Mangiennes, and would be unable to take part in the battle on the 29th. In case this were indecisive, they would form the desired reinforcements for the second day's fighting, or could, in case of victory, intercept the enemy's line of retreat.

It was known that at least one hostile corps had been at Vouziers on the evening of the 27th, that another corps had marched from Buzancy north-west in the direction of Le Chesne, and that a cavalry division was at Beaumont. Nothing was definitely known about the remaining French corps. There was a very plausible rumour that the headquarters and probably the main body of the hostile army had been at Attigny two days before. Covered by the troops at Vouziers, Buzancy and Beaumont, they might have moved to the east on a more northerly road and arrived in the vicinity of Raucourt-Yoncq, or they might have retired on Mezières. In the latter case we should have moved away from the enemy by concentrating at Damvillers and lost touch with him at least for a considerable time. In the former case we might still reach the enemy on the left bank of the Meuse, bring him to a halt, and "hold" him by simply marching straight ahead. We should certainly have overtaken the corps which had been at Vouziers on the evening of the 27th, as well as the one which had marched away from Buzancy to the north-west. As soon as the German Armies attacked one half of the French Army, the other half was bound to hurry to its support, for it could not continue the march alone and run the risk of each corps being crushed in succession by the superior enemy. An army on the march resembles a snake, for the latter when

attacked in flank or rear, must turn its head round. An army commander under whom I served, once pointed in the direction whence he intended to attack the enemy's flank and rear, and said to me: "Do you see, there is where you are to go; I am going to pinch the dog's tail," and thus explained his ideas to me in a few words.

In both cases it was necessary for the German Armies to march to the north, straight on the enemy, supporting their right on the Meuse and their left on the Argonnes. In this operation we could not count on the support of the two corps which the Army investing Metz had sent to Etain and Briey. The troops round Metz could not with safety suffer so great a diminution of their strength for any length of time, hence these corps could not be taken too far away. If the forces investing that town were necessary on the 19th August, they became more so every day, since Bazaine's troops gained time to strengthen themselves and recover from the effects of their defeat. On the other hand, if the enemy could be overtaken on the left bank of the Meuse, we might count on the co-operation of the last group of corps of the Third Army in the decisive battle, and dispense with the aid of the two corps of the Second Army.

These are the reasons why on the evening of the 27th August the Supreme Command of the German Army gave up the idea of concentrating those seven corps and issued other directions for the marches on the 28th and 29th August. On the 28th August the II. Bavarian Corps was to march from Dombasle to Clermont and Vienne, the I. Bavarian Corps to Varennes and to the south of the same, the Guard Corps to Banthéville, the IV. Corps to Montfaucon, the XII. was ordered to halt at Dun, etc.

The Third Army was ordered to advance the leading troops of its other group ($3\frac{1}{2}$ army corps) to the district between Laval and Malmy. The armies were accordingly to reach positions on the 28th August so that the XII. and Guard Corps on the line Dun-Banthéville would form

an advanced right wing, resting their right on the Meuse, supported by the IV. Corps, $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles in rear of the centre, and the I. and II. Bavarian Corps in echelon on the left, 9 miles farther to the rear.

On the 29th August the XII. and Guard Corps were to reach the line Nouart-Buzancy, the IV. Corps 7 miles in rear at Banthéville, while the two Bavarian corps were to advance to Grand Pré, and the leading troops of the remainder of the Third Army to the line Somme Py-Sechault, thus closing up on the first line.

You see how cautiously the Supreme Command acted, notwithstanding the boldness of its combinations. The XII. Corps had been pushed forward, isolated by its forced march on the 27th, to Dun and Stenay, where it seized the passages of the Meuse. That isolated advance was not exposed to any danger on the 27th, since our cavalry had reconnoitred the country so far to the front, that it was certain that only the leading troops of the enemy could reach the river at these places. On the 28th, however, the corps might need support, and the necessity for the same must increase every day. There was every desire on the part of the Supreme Command not to expose the Corps to the fate that befell Mortier on the Durenstein in 1805. It was therefore halted, and on the 28th August the Guard Corps was brought up in line with it, and the centre was supported by the IV. Corps posted 5 miles in rear. The two Bavarian corps might have been used as a support in echelon on the left after a forced march on the 28th. But the remainder of the Third Army would not have been able to support these five corps on that day. Had the latter been attacked by superior forces they would have been obliged to fall back and postpone the decision to the following day. This unenviable position was not at all probable, because by the evening of the 27th August the reports of the cavalry made it certain that one of the nearest hostile corps had remained at Vouziers and the other had retired north-west

on Buzancy. Those hostile forces which might perhaps have advanced on a more northerly road to Le Chesne-Stonne-Beaumont, would have been too far away to carry out on the 28th August a serious attack against the two corps (XII. and Guard) on the line Dun-Banthéville. On the 29th August, however, it would be different, for if the whole hostile Army advanced in that direction on the 28th, a serious attack on the position of the Meuse Army on the Andon brook early on the 29th might well be expected. For this reason we must consider the "march table" provisional so far as it relates to the 29th, and it was considered so at the time, as you will perceive from subsequent measures taken on that day.

In the orders issued by the Royal Headquarters for the 28th August it is also interesting to note the extent to which details were given which are generally left to army commanders. Such interference with subordinates becomes necessary when the latter come in close contact with each other in order to avoid crossings, checks and conflicts of authority. Here two corps of the Third Army (the two Bavarian) had been brought close to the Meuse Army for the purpose of supporting it if necessary. They were to receive direct orders from the Royal Headquarters because they might arrive too late if transmitted through the headquarters of the Army. But if direct orders were issued to these two corps, the same had to be done with the corps of the Meuse Army marching close to the former to avoid crossings and delays. The Royal Headquarters did not give detailed orders for the remainder of the Third Army, but merely indicated the places which the points of these 3½ army corps were to reach on the 28th August. Further detailed orders could be issued for this movement by the Army Commander after he had been informed of the movements of the remaining 5 corps and of the situation in general.

By the same order the 5th and 6th Cavalry Divisions were placed under the Crown Prince of Prussia (Third

Army) until further orders. That was necessary, because these two Divisions covered the front of the Third Army to the north, while the 2nd and 4th Cavalry Divisions were guarding the west. Such a change of command in the face of the enemy is sometimes not without its disadvantages, because it may happen that the troops concerned are without orders from their previous superior, and have to wait for those from their new superior. To avoid this, the Commander of the Meuse Army, in execution of the orders from the Royal Headquarters, did not in his disposition for the 28th August send "orders" to the 5th and 6th Cavalry Divisions, but "in anticipation of orders to be expected later on from the Crown Prince of Prussia," *asked* them, "to observe the enemy's right flank."

The theorist will probably attach little importance to this form, though in practice it may become important. An error in the composition of such orders which form the work of the general staff officers may, by an oversight of the commander concerned, lead to conflicts of authority which never result in good for the whole. For it is the duty of every leader to whom troops are referred for their orders, to watch with jealous care lest some one take these troops out of his hands. Otherwise he cannot be responsible for the movements of his men. In giving orders care should, therefore, be taken not to interfere with the authority of other commanders, except in case of extreme necessity, or in details which the subordinate leaders are competent to deal with themselves.

It was not intended to use the corps of the Army investing Metz on the *left* bank of the Meuse, in order not to keep them too far and too long away from the investment.

The commander of the Meuse Army issued to his corps march dispositions for the 28th August in accordance

with the orders received. In addition to the request just mentioned to the 5th and 6th Cavalry Divisions, the 12th Cavalry Division was ordered to throw out detachments towards Beaumont, the Cavalry Division of the Guard to take post between Rémonville and Buzancy, occupy the latter place, and, in conjunction with the 12th, to establish touch with the enemy without pushing him.

In connection with the great strategical questions of the day, what happened with the cavalry confronting the enemy has first to be considered, because the army corps might carry out their movements without coming into contact with the enemy. The Official Account (Part I. Vol. ii., p. 221 *et seq.*) relates what occurred with this cavalry during the day and what the latter reported.

The 6th Cavalry Division moved on Vouziers at 5.30 a.m. on learning that the enemy's camp fires at that place had gone out; its point followed the enemy's rear guard to Ballay, discovering the camps of the French 7th Corps which had halted there. The main body of the Division halted at Vouziers, threw out patrols toward Vonnegny and Attigny, found the latter place unoccupied by the enemy, and discovered in the afternoon 6 hostile battalions, perhaps the rear-guard of a corps which had retired to Le Chesne. "Information" was received that 120,000 French troops had marched through Attigny since the 23rd August, and rumour had it that the Emperor and Marshal MacMahon were at Stenay on the Meuse with 4 corps.

One regiment (13th Uhlans) of the 5th Cavalry Division advancing from Grand Pré on Vouziers, encountered the enemy at Falaise, took the place and met the Uhlans (15th) of the 6th Cavalry Division at Vouziers. The remainder of the 11th and 12th Cavalry Brigades moved westward to Monthois, the 13th Cavalry Brigade was relieved by cavalry of the Guard, and moved from Buzancy back to Grand Pré.

The leading regiment, the 3rd, of the Uhlan Brigade

of the Guard relieved the outposts of the 13th Cavalry Brigade at Buzancy, and the squadron of Captain Goddaeus of this regiment encountered the French 5th Corps which was just marching off from Briulles and detachments of which were already pitching camp at Harricourt, and threw a hostile squadron back on its infantry whose brisk fire checked pursuit. Two more squadrons of the 3rd Uhlan Regiment of the Guard, which had been ordered up, gained a view of the enemy's camp from a point near Buzancy. The heavy cavalry regiment of the 12th Cavalry Division, joined by a troop of the 3rd Guard Uhlan Regiment, hastened towards the sound of the firing, reconnoitred the heights north of Bar, and observed the hostile camps, which were thrown into considerable commotion and opened artillery fire. The report of an aide-de-camp sent forward by the Brigadier was based on the assumption that the French troops were moving from Beaumont in the direction of Autruche and Vouziers, indicating that the enemy had abandoned the advance on Metz. This report was apparently in conflict with that of Lieutenant von Schele of the 3rd Guard Uhlan Regiment which stated that the enemy of the strength of one army corps was marching eastward through Autruche. The main body of the Guard Cavalry Division bivouacked at Bayonville, a company of the Fusiliers of the Guard being sent to protect it.

Subsequent to the reconnaissance just mentioned of its heavy cavalry regiment of the Guard, the 12th Cavalry Division moved north of Bar to Nouart, and threw out outposts and patrols to the north ; but these encountered hostile detachments everywhere in the direction of Beaumont, so that a further advance was impossible. Meanwhile communication was established with the 48th Brigade at Stenay. In the afternoon hostile infantry in addition to cavalry became visible advancing from Bois des Dames to Nouart. Pursuant to its instructions not to retire towards the Meuse, but to the south, the Division

returned to Andevanne, not without greeting the approaching enemy with artillery fire. The latter, however, did not occupy Nouart.

The movements and action of the German cavalry, as given below, are of special interest.

Upon being informed by its outposts at 3 a.m. that the enemy was extinguishing his camp fires and drawing in his advanced detachments, the 6th Cavalry Division had marched at daybreak, followed the enemy, and ascertained his whereabouts. At that hour it could not possibly have been in receipt of orders from its new commander (Third Army), or even of the request of its former commander (Meuse Army), and it therefore acted quite independently. I do not think I am mistaken in making the statement that an independent cavalry division is more encouraged by its independent position to such spontaneous action in accordance with the general situation, than one which is bound down to a certain army corps of which it constitutes an integral part. You may perhaps reply, that the 6th Cavalry Division, in this instance, did nothing particular that is not laid down in our instructions for outposts, which require the cavalry of the outposts to keep the enemy in view, not to lose touch with him, and to be particularly alert before daybreak. The 6th Cavalry Division would have complied with these requirements by sending patrols after the enemy and waiting for superior orders for its brigades. The spontaneous action of this Division was here all the more important because at the same time the 5th Cavalry Division—the Official Account fails to state the reason—threw out only one regiment to Vouziers, withdrew the 13th Cavalry Brigade from Buzancy to Grand Pré, sent two brigades to the west, and must thus have lost the touch with the enemy on that day.

The Cavalry Division of the Guard meanwhile pushed its points in between the hostile masses and beyond the roads on which the enemy was marching. Still some of

the reports of these patrols were contradictory and left the Supreme Command for some time in doubt on the most important question, whether the hostile masses were moving westward or eastward. When we perceive on examining the marches of the French corps how they were again directed to and fro by counter-orders on the 28th August, we shall be able to explain these contradictory reports, though based on perfectly correct observations. On the other hand, a mistake is sometimes made as to the direction of the enemy's march, as happened to me next day. I was observing a hostile corps on the march; the battalions and batteries disappeared from view when on their approach from Boultaux Bois and Germont they reached the cross-roads and turned north-west. For hours I believed that this corps was marching on Le Chesne, which would have indicated that the enemy had given up his march to the east. The reports of the cavalry, however, and my subsequent view of the enemy's tents in the vicinity of the rock of Pierremont, showed me that the hostile corps had marched under cover of a valley to Ochles and Pierremont, i.e. north-eastward. Had I been on patrol and remained but a short time at my point of observation, I should certainly have sent in an erroneous report. It is possible, moreover, that the observer sees movements which have some other object, but which he reports as march movements. In the case before us we learn, that the French troops camping were thrown into considerable commotion by the appearance of the points of the German cavalry and prepared for attack. In such a moment the observer may have seen but one wing of the enemy making a short movement westward, for the sole purpose of taking up a position, and mistaken this movement for a march of the whole Army in a westerly direction. It is only by combining all the reports, and by following them on the map, that the Supreme Command can gain a correct idea about the enemy's movements. This goes

to confirm what I have stated in my last letter, that the observations and reports of the cavalry cannot be too numerous, that more than one patrol should invariably be sent toward the same object, and that no reliance should be placed on a single report, if the cavalry is to fulfil its strategical functions. This does not prevent some individual report from becoming decisive, if it throws light on other, contradictory, reports like that of the hussar (a one-year volunteer of good education) whose report prompted Goeben to make the movements which led to the battle of St. Quentin, after he had questioned him personally map in hand. I referred to this case once before in my Letters on Cavalry.

In this sense the reports of the 12th Cavalry Division supplemented the general conception with regard to the enemy on the evening of the 28th. This Division had encountered hostile infantry north of Nouart against which it could not effect much in the partly enclosed country and before which it retired and bivouacked at Andevanne. It ascertained, however, that the enemy had not reached Nouart on that day, and that the advance guard of the XII. Corps, with which it maintained communication, was not molested at Stenay.

Along the whole front of the German Army, now facing north, the cavalry had played its strategical rôle by throwing the enemy's advanced troops back on their main bodies and ascertaining their whereabouts until they were themselves prevented from advancing further, or were compelled to retire.

The remaining troops of the German Armies completed the prescribed movements on the 28th August without molestation. On the evening of that day :

The XII. Corps was at Dun, advance guard at Stenay, whence the railway station at Chauvancy, west of Montmédy, was destroyed, the Guard Corps at Banthéville, the

IV. Corps at Montfaucon, the I. Bavarian Corps at Varennes, the II. Bavarian Corps at Vienne, the V. Corps at Malmy, advance guard at Cernay-en-Dormoise, the Wurttemberg Division at Virginy, the XI. Corps at Courtemont and Laval, the VI. Corps at St. Menehould, the 4th Cavalry Division in rear of the 6th, echeloned from St. Morel to near Vouziers, the 2nd Cavalry Division at Suippe. The Royal Headquarters remained at St. Menehould, to which place that of the Third Army was also transferred; that of the Meuse Army remained at Malancourt.

In this position the German Armies had a front of little over 28 miles (from Laval to the Meuse). Two of the corps of the right wing were a day's march in advance of the others. In the second line we find 5½, approximately in line with each other (IV., I. and II. Bavarian, V., Wurttemberg Division and XI. Corps at Montfaucon, Varennes, Vienne, Malmy, Virginy, Laval). Only one corps (VI.) is a short day's march in rear at St. Menehould.

It is true, the marches which the corps of the Third Army and especially those of its left wing had to make in order to approach the Meuse Army so closely, were not inconsiderable. The V. Corps had marched 14 miles from Daucourt to Malmy, its advance guard 5 miles more to the Dormoise, the Wurttemberg Division 19 miles from Vieil Dampierre to Virginy, the XI. Corps more than 14 miles from Epense to Courtemont and Laval, the VI. Corps 19 miles from Charmont and Vanault to St. Menehould, the head of the 4th Cavalry Division 24 miles from Souhain to near Vouziers, the 2nd Cavalry Division from 28 to 33 miles from Coole to Suippe. The fact that some of the corps had to march behind the others no doubt increased the fatigue considerably. On the occasion of the flank march of the Meuse Army to its right, and of the marches of the French Army, we have sufficiently explained how this circumstance tends to increase the

fatigue of the troops. The Commander of the Third Army contemplated even a longer march and had ordered an advance to Montcheutin, 3 miles further, when the orders from the Royal Headquarters arrived which made it possible to spare the troops somewhat and to shorten the march. The XII. Corps alone had not marched. From the 28th August this corps was in danger of being attacked singly, as previously stated, and it was necessary therefore to support it before it could advance further.

We now turn to the orders and movements of the Guard Corps on the 28th August.

In pursuance of the orders of the Headquarters of the Meuse Army, orders were issued at 5 a.m. to the Cavalry Division of the Guard, to move in echelon from Rémonville to Buzancy, to occupy the last-named place with the light brigade and to observe the enemy without pushing him. The 1st Infantry Division of the Guard was to march to Banthéville through Nantillois and Cunel and then bivouac in rear of the road Banthéville-Dun; troops might also be quartered in Cunel and Bouru. Staff to Banthéville. Advance guard to the height north of Bouru, communication to be established with the Saxon (XII.) Corps towards Dun, with the Cavalry Division of the Guard in front, and with the 2nd Division towards Landres in the west. Hour of marching 8 a.m. The 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard was to march at 8 a.m. from Montfaucon by Cierges to Romagne (staff to the last-named place), and to bivouac in rear of the Andon brook. Advance guard to Landres to the further edge of the wood. Communication to the right with the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard. Left flank to be secured against the road Grand Pré-Varennés.

Corps Artillery to Ferme de la Ville aux Bois.¹

¹ The Ferme de la Ville aux Bois lies on the road 2 miles south of Cunel and is not shown on the plan.

Ammunition and supply columns to Nantillois, *after* the troops of the IV. Corps had passed through this place.

Corps Headquarters to Banthéville, the bridge over the Meuse to be withdrawn, light field bridging train to join the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard.

The march was not long, amounting barely to 9 miles for the foremost outposts of the Guard Corps (exclusive of the Cavalry Division). We had hoped that after a rest from the previous noon until 8 a.m. the infantry would be somewhat fresher than on the preceding day. Still I saw many an exhausted man fall out. Many were lame and complained of sore feet. Wherever I tried to give relief, I was told :—

“Our stockings (or foot wrappings) are still damp from yesterday and the day before, and chafe the feet; we cannot change them, because we took off our packs the day before yesterday.”

This proved of what doubtful utility it is to discard the knapsack. The very fact that the soldier has to take the cartridges from the knapsack and provide room for them in his haversack, thus diminishing the space for bread, is very serious. If the soldier is deprived of his pack for several days, his efficiency for battle is lost through want of indispensable necessities. The contents of the knapsack are fixed in time of peace by the most experienced officers, bearing in mind that the soldier should have to carry as little as possible; the articles are therefore restricted to those which are indispensable for existence. If he is deprived of these things in part or entirely, his efficiency as combatant is impaired to a degree corresponding to the duration of this deprivation. For this reason the discarding of the knapsack is advisable only as a tactical measure for the purpose of easing and rousing the troops for a local attack. For the time being the foot soldier rejoices at being able to lay aside his heavy burden, which weighs down his back and retards his movements. But even the mere temporary tactical use of

this expedient has the disadvantage that the troops have to return for their knapsacks and must therefore be relieved in battle and abstain from pursuit, or otherwise they have to trust to their knapsacks being brought forward on wagons, or are exposed to the risk of being separated from them for some time.

The discarding of knapsacks has proved useful for troops which are detailed for particularly difficult enterprises in battle, as turning movements, etc., in which cases the remainder of the troops could guard and send the knapsacks forward. It happened in 1866 that some detachments, in order to turn the bridge at Thaya, north of Nickolsburg, and dislodge the defenders, stripped to their shirts and forded the river holding their rifles and pouches above their heads, and in that airy costume pursued the defenders into the town itself, to the horror of the inhabitants, particularly the women. Troops would not be stripped in this manner for long marches because it once happened to be successful, and for a similar reason there should be no general rule that the men's knapsacks should be laid aside. It is only advisable as a tactical measure, and even then should be subject to the limitations mentioned above. Exceptions will of course occur as with every rule. When the Guard Corps put off their knapsacks early on the 17th August in order to hasten to the support of the troops fighting at Vionville, it was thought that the Corps would come into action by 10 a.m. at a point not more than 14 miles from where it started. This was purely a tactical measure. You may question this last assertion of mine and call it strategical because it was adopted for greater ease not only in battle, but also during the march to the battlefield. This is a minor consideration, the main point is to understand the lessons to be drawn from experience, and I think you will now be able to recognize the leading idea which underlies my words.

It is quite a different question when the enemy is at
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such a distance that each battalion may be immediately followed by its baggage wagons, so that every man can have his knapsack back after the march. This was not the case here. Each company requires at least 4 to 6 wagons, each division 50 to 80, and it is evident that so many wagons cannot be allowed to march with the troops if you wish to be ready for action at any moment.

On the 17th August the weather was warm and dry. By laying aside their knapsacks the infantry of the Guard avoided all losses through heat, and were enabled to take part in the battle on the 18th August with their full strength after marches unheard of in the history of war. This experience was one of the reasons for adopting the same measure on the 26th August. I was at the time very pleased to receive the order; but only two days afterwards I saw the other side of the question, and learned the lesson to which I have given expression above.

You will see from the orders of the Guard Corps that it was intended to bivouac astride of the road from Nantillois to Bant héville in rear of the Andon stream. On closer inspection it appeared that this position offered many advantages. In front of the ridge selected, and which was partly open, partly covered with woods, lay the valley of the Andon with a line of large, isolated farmsteads. The front of the position was therefore of considerable strength, somewhat weakened by the convex course of the valley which gave the hostile artillery the opportunity for a concentric attack. The IV. Corps, owing to its proximity, could support the Corps at an early hour. The attacking enemy could be taken in the left flank by the XII. Corps from Dun, or this corps might prolong the position of the Guard to the right from Aincreville to the Meuse. On the evening of the 28th no serious attack on this position was to be anticipated

from the enemy, who had been observed on the evening of the 27th at Vouziers, more than 19 miles away, and beyond Buzancy at Harricourt and Briulles. The enemy might however employ the 28th to approach the line of the Andon and undertake with considerable forces an attack on the morning of the 29th. The right of the position could not be turned on the 29th on account of the long detour the enemy would have to make and the obstacle formed by the Meuse. The enemy might turn the position by the left, south-west of Romagne. But then he would be in a dangerous situation himself as soon as the I. Bavarian Corps from Varennes took him in flank and rear. The bivouac of the Guard Corps in this position was therefore most favourable both for tactical and strategical reasons.

Another circumstance now arose which caused other considerations to prevail. At the beginning of the march the clouds were heavy and hanging low. Soon they discharged a pouring rain which came down vertically without wind or storm as though poured out of buckets, converting the rich soil into swamps and wetting every one to the skin. As the heads of the columns were approaching the Andon stream and the rain showed no sign of abating, the general commanding gave verbal orders that the divisions should get as many of their troops under cover in the villages of Romagne-Banthéville as could find accommodation, to hold themselves in readiness to move into the position on the sound of the alarm, and to be in position at daybreak next morning. Thus the Corps went into billets in front of their position, a most extraordinary and anomalous case in gross violation of all theories on bivouacking in rear of or at the position. The general commanding had the choice between ruining his infantry, fatigued by marches and reduced by battle and privations to almost one half of the original strength, in a bivouac of mud and mire, or getting cover for them in front of the position.

In the latter case the possibility still remained that the enemy might not appear at all; and in case he did advance, we could rely on the alertness of our cavalry, more than 14 miles to our front, to report his approach in time and enable us to move into the position and send the transport to the rear.

Theories not infrequently fare this way in practice. There are frequent exceptions to the most inviolable rules, which fail to fit each concrete case, particularly in the art of war, which asks in the first place what is reasonable and expedient, and not what is the rule or axiom. I cannot refrain from relating here another case which I witnessed, in which existing theories were still more gravely violated. It was during another period of the campaigns in which I took part. We had just passed a very severe winter day with snowstorms and 10 to 15 degrees of cold, and were pursuing an enemy who retired before us in great haste. Darkness compelled us to seek shelter. The orders were issued, and the staff to which I was attached moved by mistake into a village too far to the front, and at the entrance of which stood our most advanced infantry outposts. We discovered the mistake, but we needed rest and made ourselves as comfortable as we could. The floor of a large room of a farm-house was covered with straw on which 30 to 40 officers slept, using their saddles as pillows. I was lying by the side of the general staff officer, who received a report about 2 a.m. and gave a brief order. This roused me somewhat, and the continued laughter of my neighbour woke me up completely. On being asked the reason he told me: "The heavy baggage of the staff has just arrived and is unable to find shelter in the village. I have ordered it to go to the next village which is empty, 2½ miles in front." "For heaven's sake," I said, "that is in front of our outposts." "Of course it is," he said, "that is the very reason why it is empty. What am I to do? Am I to let men and horses perish in this terrible weather? The

enemy is retiring as fast as he can. It is 2 o'clock now, in 5 hours we shall be advancing. During these 5 hours of night and snowstorm a fleeing enemy is not likely to make an aggressive movement. The heavy baggage is therefore quite safe until we overtake it. What is amusing me so is the fact that the military chest is there too. Just think, 100,000 thalers nearest to the enemy. Is it not comical? Let them come, the wiseacres with their theories of cavalry screens and 'feelers,' which are to be sent constantly in every direction. We act in each case just as we are forced to by circumstances. The military chest on outpost duty near the enemy for five hours! I shall die of laughing!" And he laughed till the straw rustled, and the others were disturbed and angrily told him to keep quiet.

After the corps headquarters had moved into Banthéville and I had reconnoitred the position for the purpose of selecting the artillery positions in the event of a battle, I rode forward to the heights of Bouru to the advance guard of the 1st Guard Infantry Division, and, after inspecting its position I watched the column moving into Banthéville, so far as the pouring rain permitted. Irresistibly and without a check the masses moved into the village and disappeared there. I did not meet a single soldier who had been unable to find shelter. That interested me, so I waited there in spite of the storm in order to see if the whole division could really find shelter in the village. At last the rear of the division moved in, and soon nothing was visible. I rode up and down the village streets to see how it could be possible. Under every roof, including even pigsties, I saw Prussian guardsmen looking out of windows and garrets full of jokes and good humour, delighted that they did not have to bivouac in that weather. I thought old Reyher was right in saying that the worst cantonment is better than

the finest bivouac, and went to look for my quarters. Two brigade staffs and a whole battalion had made themselves comfortable there. As regards my staff, we four officers were assigned to a particularly small room with a real bed, the mattresses and blankets of which, ample as they always are with the French peasants, were spread on the ground and afforded the necessary comfort for a night's rest. Barns, hay and straw lofts, in fact everything, was full of soldiers. The best of order reigned everywhere. It must be said that the number of men of the companies had been diminished to almost one half of their war strength by losses by marching and by fighting.

At this time the French army was not nearly so well off.

On the evening of the 27th August MacMahon had issued orders according to which the 1st Corps was to march from Voncq to Mazerny on the 28th, the 12th Corps from Le Chesne to Vendresse, the 5th from Brioules to Poix, the 7th from Vouziers to Chagny. He evidently intended, therefore, to continue the retreat to the north-west, which he had begun on the afternoon of the 27th, and thought that, by making a march of 14 miles, he would prevent the German armies from surrounding him. For he had learned that the cavalry of the Third Army had come in contact with the corps of Faily and Douay (5th and 7th) and that the Crown Prince of Saxony was advancing from Verdun towards Buzancy. You will see that he was not badly informed, although he had not pushed his cavalry out towards the enemy. At the same time he knew that on the 25th August Bazaine was still at Metz. "While on the one hand every hope of an early junction with the latter disappeared, MacMahon recognized on the other hand the danger of being attacked on further advancing to the east, by portions of the Army investing Metz, whilst the Crown Prince of Prussia would

cut off his retreat to Paris. Under these circumstances the Marshal decided to move the Army for the present back to Mezières. In the evening he gave corresponding orders for the following day, and reported his intention and motives by telegraph to the Minister of War." (Official Account.)

But the Regency at Paris was far more clever than MacMahon, and ordered him to advance to relieve Bazaine. The chief argument was that otherwise a revolution would break out in Paris. The actual condition of things was expected to apply to these arguments, and if it did not must be made to. It was stated that the Crown Prince of Prussia was not at Châlons, but a brother of the King with a cavalry advance guard, that the former had turned off to the north, that MacMahon had a start of 36 to 48 hours, and that the forces in front of him were merely detachments of the army investing Metz, which, deceived by MacMahon's march to Reims, had extended as far as the Argonnes.

I believe the Emperor on this day shared the opinions of the Regency. At any rate I know, from reliable sources, that after the capitulation of Sedan the Emperor asked for Prince Frederick Charles, and turned pale with surprise on being told that he was investing Metz. He had given himself up to the illusion that Prince Frederick Charles had taken part in the battle of Sedan with his whole Army, and that Bazaine was close on his heels and capable of reversing the state of affairs.

There was no necessity for the second telegram to MacMahon, in which the Cabinet at Paris ordered him to hasten to Bazaine's relief, adding that Vinoy, with the 13th Corps, was being sent from Paris to Reims and Mezières. On the receipt of the first telegram MacMahon had issued orders for the march of the Army to Montmédy. Before, however, this new disposition had been prepared and had reached the corps, the latter had commenced their march according to the former

orders. The transport columns in particular had been sent on ahead to Mazerny. The columns crossed each other, whilst pouring rain added to the fatigues of the troops, caused in the first place by the counter-orders. Wet to the skin, exhausted and dispirited, the troops reached their destinations late in the evening, some of them not before the morning of the 29th August, although these were not more than 10 miles east of those of the previous evening. The 5th Corps reached Belval and Bois des Dames (and was observed that evening by the Saxon cavalry), the 7th Corps reached Boulton aux Bois (followed by the 6th Prussian Cavalry Division), the 12th Corps La Besace, the 1st Corps Le Chesne, Margueritte's Cavalry Division was withdrawn to Sommauthe, Bonnemain's Cavalry Division was pushed out towards Grandes Armoises. Headquarters were transferred to Stonne.

I have frequently pointed out to you the disastrous effect of frequent counter-orders on the spirit of an army, especially when the troops cannot understand the necessity of the counter-orders. When the counter-order changing the direction of the march to the north demanded great efforts from the Meuse Army, the troops bore them willingly because they were informed that it was a question of barring the enemy's road to Metz. It is hardly possible that MacMahon could convince his troops of the necessity of the marches and counter-marches on the 27th and 28th August, for he himself was not convinced of their utility. It would hardly have raised the confidence of his soldiers in their commander, had he informed them that he was merely carrying out the orders of an ill-advised provisional government, inspired by the clamour of the Parisian mob. The soldier very soon finds out whether he is led by a determined commander or by a vacillating one. Small wonder, therefore, that the French army was in such bad spirits on the 28th August. I am inclined to believe the complaints of

many French officers, since published by the Press, that many of the recruits deserted and returned to their homes in peasant clothes, when opportunity offered.

The difficulties of the march were considerably increased by the fact that the whole army had only two roads to march on. On both of these two of the French corps (each almost twice as strong as a Prussian corps) were advancing with all their transport. We have often discussed how much this adds to the fatigue of a march. When such immense masses are crowded together on one road, no shelter can be found for them. All the troops were obliged to bivouac. Then came the storm on the 28th August; the troops had to camp on the fields which the rain had converted into morasses. The "tentes d'abris" carried by the French infantry did not furnish complete protection against such a downpour, and no protection at all against the miry ground underneath. Taking the splendid condition of even the by-roads into consideration, I think that the French army might have found more roads than the two mentioned for the marches from west to east. Many such roads are shown on the staff map, and it can hardly be assumed that they were worse than those running north and south which we were using. The fault, therefore, lay in the want of knowledge of details of the French general staff, and in the wrong application of the principles of marching, sufficient weight not being given to moving in several parallel columns. Ignorance of elementary practical strategy exhausted the troops, and deprived them of all shelter and comfort.

If the French Army had marched in several parallel columns with a depth of one or two divisions, the cavalry would have had to be thrown out towards the enemy to protect those marching in front from being surprised by a superior enemy. But the French Army did not contemplate such a method of employing their cavalry. On the 28th August Margueritte's Cavalry Division was with-

drawn to Sommerance after a timid advance on Beaumont, during which not a single patrol was sent to Stenay, which was only 6 miles away; and if you look at the sketch of the positions of the Armies on the 28th August in the Official Account, you will see that the two cavalry divisions bivouacked between the four corps as though they were part of a transport column and in need of protection. Thus it happened that the daring patrols of the German cavalry were able to penetrate beyond the southernmost of the two roads used by the French corps, to place themselves between the two hostile columns, and observe them without being attacked.

All these disturbing elements, however, which impaired the efficiency of the French Army, are not so important as the one fact that the Cabinet at Paris, by its decision sent to MacMahon after midnight on the 27th August, drove the latter to the destruction which he could now no longer escape. On the whole MacMahon's information was correct. Since his cavalry was not thrown out in front, a system of information must have been well organized at this time amongst the inhabitants. The manner in which the Cabinet twisted the news, in which it perverted those reports which did not fit its previously conceived opinion, in which it sought to deceive the Commander-in-Chief by false representations, is quite in accordance with the methods of certain political parties which seek, by a network of lies and half-truths, to turn a vote in their favour, or to gain the election of a deputy. Much of the political literature in recent times in our own country has been of the same character, attempting to persuade the reader that the "Septennat" meant an extension of the service with the colours to 7 instead of 3 years, for the sole purpose of inducing the voters to elect a representative hostile to the Government. In parliamentary contests such confusion of terms may gain temporary results. In war, where each error involves the lives of thousands of men, such a Gordian knot of lies is

cut with the sword. It is then a crime, treason to the country, to circulate such an error intentionally.

If you wish to know what I think MacMahon should have done on receipt of this telegram from Paris, I must confess that it would be difficult for me, even now, to give you an answer after thinking it out for hours or even days, and you must take into consideration that he had no time for reflection. His counter-orders would in any event not reach his troops until after they had commenced to march in obedience to the former orders. The answer to your question cannot be of a purely strategical nature. The whole political situation must be considered, for the Regency gave as its main reason the apprehension of a revolution in Paris. We have, it is true, laid down as the general principle, that when the dice of war are cast, military considerations alone should prevail. But here at Paris a danger was threatening which might paralyze all MacMahon's efforts. If he had continued to retreat towards Paris against the orders of the Regency, he would certainly have been charged with cowardice and disobedience, and branded as a traitor whether a revolution had taken place or not. On the other hand, if he saw plainly that a continuation of the march to the east would end in the destruction of his army, he might have foreseen with equal certainty that the revolution in Paris would break out with all the more fury. The most correct thing would have been to obey the dictates of strategy, i.e. of sound reason, and to retreat on Paris. If a revolution broke out, it should have been crushed by the army without delay, and then would have been the time to think of defence, to reinforce the army until it was superior to the enemy; only then could Bazaine be relieved. But MacMahon alone could not do this. He was merely the Marshal; the Emperor only was the man to decide on this step and carry

it out. Napoleon I. returned from Russia to Paris without any troops worth speaking of. His will made armies rise from the ground, and with them he continued the war. He did the same a year later. But Napoleon III. was not Napoleon I. No glorious traditions made him immortal even in his lifetime. On the contrary, he was a ruined man, who had hitherto skilfully and successfully operated with his "Système de balance" and got out of many an embarrassing situation. He now saw his system fail and, being bodily ill, appeared to be also mentally weak and without a will of his own. MacMahon could not expect that the Emperor would listen to so bold and heroic a proposition. Perhaps he did suggest this step and failed. Who knows?

As I stated when speaking of Gyulai, who did not fully and completely agree with the views of his sovereign, nothing was left for MacMahon to do but to return his bâton to the Emperor and to request that he would appoint another commander who would concur with the suggestions of the Regency. I now call these telegrams mere suggestions, though I previously called them orders. They constituted orders for MacMahon, but for the Emperor they could only be suggestions. Was there time for the former to resign the command? He received the fatal telegrams after midnight. Until the Emperor had appointed a new commander-in-chief, and the latter been able to acquaint himself with the situation, make his decision, and then issue his disposition, the marches on the 28th would have been completed before the orders could have reached the troops, and the execution of the telegraphic orders would have been beyond the range of possibility. We have seen how Hess on his arrival at the bridge over the Ticino in 1859 was no longer able to change the directions of the corps. We have seen how the change of commanders on the 12th August, 1870, at the critical moment cost Marshal Bazaine a whole day. The responsibility for a march to the west would still

have been placed on MacMahon's shoulders. Let us suppose that the Marshal had found time to ask the Emperor at Le Chesne after midnight, to relieve him from the command of the Army and to place it in the hands of General Lebrun, who happened to be present ; let us assume that the latter was willing to accept the command and to obey the orders of the Government, that the Marshal asked to be given the command of the corps thus vacated or to be allowed to serve as a private soldier. All these things may have happened without becoming public, because as a rule such transactions are conducted privately. Assuming that such was the case, and that the Emperor declined to relieve the Marshal from the command, what was the latter to do ? He could not refuse to obey at this critical moment. He could do nothing but obey against his convictions, and to hope that at the decisive moment an enemy's bullet would furnish him with the certificate that he had done his duty as a soldier. It was not his fault that on the 1st of September the bullet struck his hip and not his breast.

Why discuss all these reflections and combinations of a personal character, I hear you ask ? Because I wish to point out that an unfortunate commander should never be condemned without a complete knowledge of all the psychological influences which affected him.

TWENTY-NINTH LETTER.

THE 29TH AUGUST—NOUART.

THE "march tables," issued by the Royal Headquarters on the 27th August for the next two days, pointed out the destinations of the Meuse Army for the 29th August; the XII. Corps was to reach Nouart, the Guard Corps, Buzancy, and the IV. Corps, Banthéville. The two Bavarian corps were to march to Grand Pré, and the points of the remaining corps of the Third Army were to move up to the line Somme Py-Séchault, and to close up as much as possible.

So far as distance alone is concerned, these destinations could have been reached without unusual fatigue from the positions occupied on the evening of the 28th. The calculations of the Supreme Command had, however, to be altered materially, if the possibility of a collision with the enemy's main forces on the 29th was to be taken in consideration. The reports which had reached the Royal Headquarters up to noon on the 28th, seemed to preclude this. I mentioned these reports in my last letter, and you will have seen from them that they suggested the inference that the enemy was retiring to the north-west; this indeed had taken place early on the 28th in pursuance of MacMahon's first disposition. The report of Lieut. von Schele to the effect that a hostile army corps was marching from Autruche to the east, opposed this idea, but the report was dated 6.30 p.m., and therefore could not have influenced the orders which were issued at 7 p.m. at

Clermont, 28 miles away.¹ These orders must therefore have been based on the combined reports received up to that hour, and directed the pursuit of the retreating enemy with all speed in order to cut him from Paris and drive him northward. The Meuse Army was directed to adhere to the "march tables" issued on the 27th for the 29th August. In a similar manner the two Bavarian corps were directed to Champigneulle and Grand Pré. The remainder of the Third Army, however, was ordered further to the front than was intended in these "march tables," the corps of the left wing being ordered to reach Vouziers, which would bring them in line with the foremost corps of the Meuse Army. This would bring the armies in such a position that the first line, facing north, had a front of 19 miles from Nouart to Vouziers, while the corps of the second line took up a position 7 to 9 miles in rear of the first. From this close formation you may conclude that it was believed possible to bring about a decision on the 30th August.

About 9 p.m. reports arrived at Clermont stating that the enemy had commenced his movement to the east, though the report of the 12th Cavalry Division of its own retreat from Nouart to Andevanne before hostile infantry by no means confirmed this statement. It appears from the counter-order issued at 11 p.m. on the 28th August, that the Supreme Command assumed that one or two hostile corps were moving on the road from Buzancy to Stenay, and that the remainder were moving to the east on a road further north. The two foremost corps of the Meuse Army (XII. and Guard) in their position, Dun-Banthéville, were not quite 9 miles from the southern one of these two lines of march. Now if in the hurry of pursuit these two corps advanced on the 29th August on Buzancy-Nouart, and if the enemy, in order to rid himself of the troublesome patrols, should strike a blow to the south, it was

¹ The reports received at the Royal Headquarters on the 28th are given in Vol. ii., Part i., Appendix xxxv., Official Account.—ED.

quite possible that a collision might take place in the early hours of the morning, and that these two German corps might encounter the enemy in crushing superiority before they could be supported. For this reason the utmost caution was enjoined, and the manner in which this order is worded so as not to alarm the troops, is very characteristic :

“In order not to provoke the enemy’s attack before sufficient German forces are concentrated, it is left to the discretion of the Crown Prince of Saxony to assemble his three corps at an early hour in a defensive position perhaps between Aincreville and Landres.”¹

The I. Bavarian Corps was to reach Sommerance by 10 a.m. so as to be available at that hour to support the left of the Meuse Army, should it be attacked in the position named.

The II. Bavarian Corps was now ordered to St. Juvin, as Grand Pré had been assigned to the V. Corps, and had a difficult march across the northern spurs of the Argonnes Forest ; it could therefore hardly be able to take part in an engagement before noon on the 29th. The Third Army was ordered to send the V. Corps through Montcheutin to Grand Pré, and to move the remaining 2½ corps of the left wing so that they could be brought up, if necessary, for a decisive battle on the 30th August.

It is interesting to conjecture from these orders the plans of the Supreme Command should the enemy attack the Meuse Army. The latter was at first to act on the defensive in its position on the Andon brook (the particular point had to be left to the discretion of the army commander, as it would depend on the nature of the ground). It might have to depend on its own forces until 10 a.m., and up to that hour it must be able to resist greatly superior forces, although it was known that the enemy

¹ See Vol. ii., Part i., p. 226, Official Account.—ED.

would have at least 7 to 9 miles to march and would require considerable time to deploy a force superior to three corps. After 10 a.m. it could be supported by one Bavarian corps which would arrive on its left flank. These four army corps might be expected to make a determined resistance. Even should the enemy set all his forces in motion against them from the road Attigny-Beaumont, his last army corps would have to traverse at least 14 miles and would require several hours more to deploy for battle. Thus he would not be able to develop superiority against the four corps of the Meuse Army until late in the afternoon of the 29th August, and by then the appearance of the II. Bavarian Corps at St. Juvin would threaten his flank and rear and weaken his offensive. But even were it compelled to fall back from its position at Aincreville-Sommerance towards the south between the Aire and the Meuse, the II. Bavarian Corps would yet reach St. Juvin on the 30th August, and the V. Corps Grand Pré, while 2½ army corps would be in the rear of the latter, all ready to give battle and destroy the enemy by attacking him in flank and rear.

Supposing, however, that the enemy did not attack the Meuse Army on the 29th August, but continued his eastward movement or retired to the north-west? In that case it could not remain in position at the Andon brook; if it lost that day for marching, it might likewise lose touch with the enemy, who had not as yet been completely deprived of the advantages of the initiative. In that case it was indispensable, that the Meuse Army should continue its advance against the south road of the enemy, unless it was attacked by superior numbers. For this reason the concluding sentence of the order issued at 11 p.m. points out, that the Supreme Command might possibly order this advance for the 29th August, and even leaves it to the discretion of the commander of the Meuse Army to seize the enemy's southern route with-

out special order, if this course was considered advisable. In this way the Supreme Command left one of the most important decisions of the day partly to the discretion of the Crown Prince of Saxony. Can this determination be approved? Did not the Supreme Command thereby relinquish the direction of the operations? The question is interesting and the answer to it is highly instructive :— As soon as it was certain that the enemy was either continuing his movement to the east or was retiring to the north-west, no time was to be lost, he must be attacked or pursued at once. If the necessary information should come from the 5th or 6th Cavalry Divisions, the report, transmitted through the headquarters of the Third Army, would reach the Royal Headquarters at Clermont earlier than the Meuse Army, and the Supreme Command could thus order the advance at once. Should the discovery be made by the cavalry of the Meuse Army (cavalry divisions of the Guard and XII. Corps)—which was more probable because they were in touch with the enemy's infantry and only 5 miles in front of that army—it would lose considerable time by transmitting the report to Clermont and waiting for orders. The earliest reports received would be those of the patrols sent out at day-break, which could not well arrive before 7 a.m. Four or five hours might easily elapse before the reports were transmitted to Clermont and orders received in reply ; the Meuse Army then could not march before noon ; and if the enemy retired, the march might easily extend into the night. A night march before a decisive battle does not produce a very favourable result. On the other hand it was also possible, that the Meuse Army in its position on the Andon brook might remain in doubt as to the enemy's movements until noon. If in that case it had to wait four or five hours for orders from the Royal Headquarters, the day would be lost for marching, and the enemy would gain a corresponding start. Nothing therefore remained but to leave the decision in the hands of the Crown Prince

of Saxony in case the latter received the desired information about the enemy first.

The laconic brevity with which these considerations are expressed in the concluding sentence of the orders of 11 p.m., may serve as a model for the style and composition of orders. No mention is made of more than one case. Everything is expressed in these brief words: "The continuation of the offensive against the road Vouziers-Buzancy-Stenay is deferred ; but an early seizure of the same by the Meuse Army is not precluded, should it be merely opposed by weak hostile forces." Goethe wrote once that his letter had grown to such a length only because he had no time to express himself more briefly. He had not mastered the art of expressing himself briefly, though pressed for time. This art is part of the strategical duties of the general staff, but it can only be acquired by practice.

The Supreme Command found itself on that day obliged to leave the decision in the hands of a subordinate commander, a feature which in war occurs more frequently in minor tactics. For instance, when a battalion on the offensive encounters an enemy of unknown strength, a company is sent forward, to cause the enemy to deploy his forces. Not only the strength and position of the enemy, but also the action of the company first engaged will decide how and where the battalion commander will employ his remaining companies, for he cannot ride to the front and give that company additional instructions, as is so frequently done in peace.

I have repeatedly pointed out to you the difference between the German system of issuing orders in 1870 and that of Gyulai in 1859; the latter issued detailed orders for everything, whilst the former restricted itself to ordering what was absolutely necessary and left the subordinate leaders as much freedom as possible. For the 29th August the Supreme Command of the German Army extended this freedom of action so far as to leave to

the Meuse Army the power to decide for the whole German Army.

Had the situation of the evening of the 28th August presented itself to Gyulai in 1859, he would certainly have issued three dispositions during the night each annulling the former one and each of which would have contained detailed instructions for every army corps and detachment for three different cases. These dispositions could hardly have reached the corps in time to prevent marches and counter-marches, and the exhaustion of the troops; the German system of command in 1870, on the other hand, produced subordinates who would act on their own responsibility, in accordance with the general intentions of the Supreme Command, and who were certain of the latter's approval. We shall recognize this at once from the manner in which the commander of the Meuse Army understood and executed these orders on his own responsibility. The subordinate leaders of Gyulai's army were prevented from developing such independence of action, because every minute detail was invariably laid down for them.

In turning now to the execution of the orders from the Royal Headquarters by the Meuse Army, the Official Account states that the commander of the latter intended to await the result of the cavalry reconnaissance before making any movement, and that after receiving the reports of the patrols sent out at dusk, he considered an advance early on the 29th to be perfectly safe.

But at 4 a.m. the order of 11 p.m. arrived from the Royal Headquarters which enjoined caution. Greater importance must therefore be attached to the appearance of hostile infantry north of Buzancy.

Three different views, which were partly in opposition to each other, presented themselves successively to the commander of the Meuse Army. The "march tables" of

the 27th August, partly confirmed by the order of 7 p.m. of the 28th August, directed an advance against a retreating enemy, who was to be overtaken if possible. The order of 11 p.m. of the 28th August assumed the possibility of the Meuse Army being attacked in its position on the Andon brook early on the 29th August, and recommended the defensive, promising at the same time the support of the I. Bavarian Corps, which, however, would not arrive at Sommerance before 10 a.m. The concluding sentence of this order did not prohibit the Meuse Army from seizing the road Vouziers-Buzancy-Stenay, if only a small hostile force should be encountered there. The Meuse Army was thus at liberty to take this road by fighting, provided that a general action was not commenced, for which the Supreme Command could not concentrate sufficient forces before the 30th August, to justify taking up the offensive.

It is difficult indeed to imagine a more difficult decision than the one which confronted the Crown Prince. He was required to decide and recognize whether it was a question of maintaining the defensive against superior forces; or of advancing against an enemy who was attempting a flank march across his front, and seizing one of the roads the latter was moving by without provoking a decisive battle on that day; or of pursuing an enemy who was retiring to the north-west. The problem of engaging in battle without seeking a decision, is always one of the most difficult because it is by no means easy to recognize the moment when to disengage, and because the withdrawal of the troops engaged is always a hazardous undertaking. At any rate, the Meuse Army would certainly have to remain in close touch with the enemy and prevent him from continuing his march to the east unmolested or from gaining a considerable start in his retreat to the north-east.

Though not expressly stated in the Official Account, it may be presumed that the decision of the Meuse

Army at 4 a.m. on the 29th August was influenced by the withdrawal of the Cavalry Division of the XII. Corps from Nouart on account of the appearance of hostile infantry, and by the bivouac of this Division being moved back to Andevanne on the evening of the 28th. For the disposition issued at 4 a.m. directed this Division to reconnoitre toward Nouart. The Crown Prince of Saxony thus knew that the Division had abandoned that place. Therefore he did not order an advance, and not only waited for the results of further reconnaissance by the cavalry, but ordered the whole army to take up a defensive position in readiness to receive an attack. The country between Aincreville and Landres recommended by the order from the Royal Headquarters, was unfavourable for defence, and for this reason he, on his own responsibility, took up a more favourable position in rear of the Andon brook and the villages of Romagne, Banthéville and Aincreville. The XII. Corps was to push an advance guard toward Villers-devant-Dun, and the Cavalry Division supported by this advance guard was to reconnoitre toward Nouart. The Guard Corps was to leave its advance guards on the further bank of the Andon brook, and to reconnoitre the vicinity of Bar with its cavalry. The position on the Andon brook had its left flank thrown back from Banthéville to Romagne. This entailed the disadvantage mentioned in my last letter that the assailant could deliver a concentric attack on it. On the other hand it offered the advantage that the II. Bavarian Corps, which was to be expected at Sommerance at 10 a.m., could attack the enemy's right, an advantage which promised to more than balance the disadvantage.

The dispositions issued from the headquarters of the Meuse Army at 4 a.m. on the 29th August are notable on account of another deviation from the orders of the Royal Headquarters. Although the latter stated: "The observation of the line of the Meuse from Dun to Stenay

will continue to be performed, by the brigade detached to the latter place," the disposition issued by the commander of the Meuse Army nevertheless permitted the XII. Corps to withdraw this (the 48th) brigade up stream to the position, to occupy which the whole XII. Corps had to cross the Meuse at Dun. Such independence can only be exercised by those leaders who are familiar with the general intentions of the superior authorities and are sure of acting in accordance therewith. The commander of the Meuse Army certainly knew the local conditions at Stenay better than the Royal Headquarters at Clermont. He knew—as we also know now—that the defence of the Meuse towards the west was difficult at Stenay. A detached infantry brigade would not be able to resist for any length of time a serious attack by superior forces, on the contrary it might be thus placed in the worst possible position. "Since the line of the Meuse between Dun and Stenay is only to be observed," says this order, the observation was left to the cavalry regiment attached to the 48th Brigade, and to the regiment of Zieten Hussars which had just arrived from the army investing Metz, whilst the infantry brigade was used to strengthen the defensive position, as this accession of strength might be decisive. The IV. Army Corps was placed in reserve to the north of Nantillois approximately in rear of the centre of the position, though perhaps a little closer to the more exposed left flank.

There was, however, no occasion to make use of this defensive position. When the Crown Prince of Saxony assembled the corps commanders on the heights south of Aincreville at 8 a.m., he concluded from their reports that the enemy was not advancing in his direction. For the latter had failed to occupy Nouart during the night after it had been evacuated by the Cavalry Division of the XII. Corps, and a squadron of Uhlans (Zimmermann) had trotted beyond the outpost line of the cavalry at

Buzancy and found the country north of Bar and Harri-court unoccupied by the enemy. On the other hand the XII. Corps reported that the patrols of the 2nd Heavy Cavalry Regiment (attached to 48th Infantry Brigade lately posted at Stenay) had been unable to penetrate into the Bois de Dieulet, whence it might be supposed that the enemy had remained north of Nouart during the night, although his infantry which had prevented one of the cavalry brigades from passing the previous night at Tailly, had withdrawn to the north. The Crown Prince of Saxony inferred from all these reports that an "immediate seizure of the road Vouziers-Buzancy-Stenay on the part of the Meuse Army" (the expression used in the order of 11 p.m. on the 28th August) was in accordance with the intentions of the Supreme Command, and therefore ordered the troops to advance at once without waiting for a reply to his report to this effect which he had despatched to the Royal Headquarters. (The report was received there at 9 a.m.)

The Cavalry Division of the Guard was ordered to advance through Boulton-aux-Bois and Anthe against the road from Le Chesne to Beaumont, as well as against the latter place; the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard was to march to Buzancy, the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard to Thénorgues. The Saxon Cavalry Division was to move through Nouart and Oches against the road from Le Chesne to Beaumont, followed by the advance guard of the XII. Corps, main body of the XII. Corps to Nouart, IV. Corps to Rémonville and Bayonville.

Advancing thus without waiting for the arrival of the I. Bavarian Corps at Sommerance, and leaving their left flank unprotected, the two corps (Guard and XII.) were again in the first line, and unsupported as they had been the night before at Dun and Stenay. The commander of the Meuse Army therefore expressly stated that the object of all these movements was simply to gain information about the enemy, and that the Supreme Command did

not contemplate a general action until the following day.

The following is a precis of the events of the day as given in the Official Account. The points of the Cavalry Division of the XII. Corps encountered hostile infantry north of Nouart marching from west to east towards Beauclair. The former did not, therefore, advance beyond Nouart, but waited for the arrival of the advance guard. The latter, advancing from Nouart to the heights beyond, brought about three battalions and four batteries into action and threw the enemy's advanced troops back to a position between Bois des Dames and Champy, which was then held by a hostile division (Lespart). The enemy suspended his eastward march at once and took up a position as soon as the Saxon infantry appeared. The XII. Corps upon reaching Nouart prohibited any further attack in accordance with the instructions received from superior authority. The advance guard was ordered to withdraw the companies which had advanced as far as Champy, the enemy at the same time retiring northward to Beaumont. Communication with Stenay, which had been interrupted by the enemy for some time, was re-established through the Bois de Dieulet. Several squadrons had advanced beyond Fossé before and during the engagement, and discovered another French army corps (7th) at St. Pierremont. After the engagement the Cavalry Division was ordered to reconnoitre beyond Fossé towards Beaumont, but encountered hostile infantry at Belval and St. Pierremont, which prevented their further movements in that enclosed country. The enemy covered his retreat by a rear guard of two brigades between Champy and Bois des Dames, which retired on Beaumont at 9 p.m.

In the meantime the Cavalry Division of the Guard Corps had advanced the 3rd Uhlán Regiment of the Guard. One of the patrols sent to Sommauthe captured a French commissariat officer who was coming in its

direction. On encountering a superior number of Chasseurs it fell back on its squadron coming up in support, which in turn captured the staff officer whom the Chasseurs were escorting. The latter had documents in his possession which disclosed the French dispositions for the 29th August. He was on his way to General de Failly with orders to move from Nouart to Beaumont, not to Stenay. The Chasseurs were pursued to the vicinity of Germont. Infantry and cavalry camps were observed there as well as at Boulton-aux-Bois. The 1st Infantry Division of the Guard followed in rear of the Cavalry Division, its advance guard reaching Bar shortly before noon. The main body of the Cavalry of the Guard took up a position north of Harricourt. The 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard, advancing on Thénorgues, had likewise observed the hostile camps at Boulton-aux-Bois, and other masses marching toward Autruche. One squadron followed them closely and reported at 5 p.m. from Fontenois that the enemy was going into camp at St. Pierremont.¹ The sound of guns from the direction of Nouart caused the general commanding the Guard Corps to halt the main body of the 1st Infantry Division until he heard whether his assistance was required there. When he learned that it was not needed, the main body of the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard moved to Buzancy, and only despatched three cavalry regiments to the XII. Corps, *vid* Fossé; but they were unable to advance much beyond that place on account of large bodies of hostile infantry.

I must remark here that in studying military history in my younger days I was always told that it was never a mistake for a commander to march at once to where he

¹ The footnote on p. 229, Vol. ii., Part i., Official Account, states that this report reached the Royal Headquarters at 3.45 p.m. This must be a misprint, for the report of Captain von Scholten is dated 5 p.m. So far our author, but reference to Appendix xxxvi. in the same volume would seem to show that this footnote may refer to one of the other three reports.—ED.

heard the sound of guns. Such a general rule may be very dangerous. There may be a very considerable difference in "the sound of guns." One cannot march in the direction of every gun that is fired without being constantly on the move. On the other hand the sound of guns is sometimes very misleading as regards direction and distance when wind and echo are combined. In 1866 a very numerous staff believed for hours that they were hearing a heavy cannonade. It was only the rumbling of a local thunderstorm. Here, at Buzancy, it would have been wrong for the Prince of Wurtemberg to march in the direction of the cannonade at Nouart and relinquish his own special task without first finding out what the cannonade really meant.

In the evening the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard stood at Buzancy and Bar, advance guard at Harricourt, the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard at Thénorgues and Briquenay with their Cavalry at Boulton-aux-Bois and Germont, which reported Autruche, Anthé, and Belleville unoccupied by the enemy. The squadron which had accompanied the enemy's march to St. Pierremont, remained during the night in Fontenois in the immediate neighbourhood of the enemy's bivouac.

The IV. Army Corps moved to Rémonville and Bayonville. The headquarters of the Meuse Army passed the night at the latter place.

Of the Third Army, the 6th Cavalry Division followed the hostile troops on their march from Vouziers on the 29th August and observed their march at Voncq, Quatre-Champs, and Boulton-aux-Bois. The 16th Regiment of Hussars dismounted and cleared Voncq of the hostile rear guard. The 5th Cavalry Division advanced to Attigny against the communications of the hostile army, a detachment destroying the railway between Rethel and Mézières at Faux. The 4th Cavalry Division remained at Vouziers

and the 2nd moved to Gratreuil. Both were probably ordered to reconnoitre toward Reims (though not expressly so stated in the Official Account), where 100,000 French troops were said to be assembling. (In reality, only one division of Vinoy's corps had been there since the 26th August.)

The Third Army was directed by the orders of 11 p.m. of the 28th August to move its left wing, consisting of 3½ corps, so that they would be able to take part in a decisive battle on the 30th August. The I. Bavarian Corps marched to Sommerance and St. Juvin, the II. Bavarian Corps only reached Chévières after an exhausting march over the hills, and did not cross the Aire. The V. Corps, with the Wurttemberg Division, marched to Grand Pré, its cavalry observing the hostile troops marching from Boult-aux-Bois to the north-east. The XI. Corps marched to Monthois and St. Morel, the VI. Corps to Vienne, Headquarters of the Third Army to Senuc, and the Royal Headquarters to Grand Pré.

Let us now consider the orders and the events of the Guard Corps. At 11 p.m. on the 28th August the general commanding had issued orders to the two infantry divisions to take up a position next morning in rear of the Andon brook: the 1st Division astride the road Nantillois-Banthéville, the 2nd Division at Romagne, the road from Varennes to Dun skirting the front of both. This position was to be occupied by 9 a.m.; the advance guards in front were to remain there; the Corps Artillery was to take position at Cunel; the light baggage only was to remain with the troops. The divisional and heavy baggage were to be parked at Cierge, ammunition columns and field hospitals at Ferme de la Ville-au-Bois. The Cavalry Division was told to keep touch with the enemy.

Since the cavalry had reported that Buzancy, 10 miles away, was unoccupied by the enemy on the previous evening, we were certain, relying on the advanced cavalry,

that the enemy would not be able to attack this position before 9 a.m. No earlier hour was fixed for the occupation of the position in order to rest the troops of the divisions of which the battalions would be on the move, even under these arrangements, at 7 a.m. and earlier, since the baggage columns had first to be withdrawn from the villages and farmsteads in front of the position. At any rate, the knowledge that for the present the two corps (Guard and XII.) were to depend on themselves, and might be attacked by a superior enemy, created an uneasy feeling in the Army Headquarters Staff. For although it was known that the I. Bavarian Corps would march from Varennes at 5 a.m. and reach Sommerance at 10 a.m., still, hours must elapse after its arrival before it could fully deploy for battle.

I felt again how the mere fact of being on the defensive affects one's spirits and confidence. The anticipation of being attacked and the order to hold out to the last man have a depressing effect on the mind, since involuntarily the conclusion is drawn that support is needed. On the other hand, the order to attack is refreshing, though it may be well known and seen that the enemy to be attacked is superior in numbers. Whilst we were moving against the formidable position at St. Privat, a certain humour, a confident cheerfulness, which vented itself in many a joke, never left us. Early on the 29th August there were plenty of faces betraying apprehension. Such effects on the mind have to be taken into consideration in strategical measures, for the disposition of the troops affects in turn their efficiency. This is one of the many advantages of the offensive over the defensive.

The feeling at headquarters became still more uneasy when a few small misunderstandings excited, temporarily, the suspicion that all the arrangements of the previous evening might have been upset by errors in transmission. Fortunately it was possible to prevent any injurious consequences in good time. The details of this incident

contain nothing that is instructive. The fact, however, that such misunderstandings may arise in spite of a well-organized system of issuing orders, proves that one should always be prepared for misunderstandings, and therefore every effort should be made to ascertain whether the orders are being properly executed.

The strategist should therefore consider the possibility of such frictions in elaborating his dispositions and orders. Another reason for framing orders so as to leave the subordinates as much freedom of action as possible, and to enable them to remedy the smaller misunderstandings by modifying the measures ordered.

In order to hide their apprehension from the soldiers and to prevent them from thinking that we were retreating, the generals rode from battalion to battalion and explained to the soldiers that the retrograde movement was made for the sole purpose of taking up the position in which they should have bivouacked, and that it was only on account of the pouring rain that this bivouac had been changed for cantonments in the villages.

The Guard Corps had not yet completely taken up its position when the previously mentioned order by the Commander of the Meuse Army was issued at the meeting of the three corps commanders south of Aincreville; instructions were then issued from the Corps Headquarters directing an advance.

These prescribed the execution of the army order with which we are familiar, and ordered the cavalry to make three specific reconnaissances: one toward Boulton-aux-Bois, one through Authe on the road to Le Chesne-Beaumont, and one to the north against Beaumont.

The supply and transport columns were to halt for further orders as soon as the divisions should have reached Buzancy and Thénorgues respectively.

The men were in very good spirits in the morning and showed their appreciation of having been spared the discomfort of bivouacking in the wretched weather, and having

been able to sleep in the dry, though crowded, stables and barns. The men were very pleased when the advance commenced immediately after the order had been received. Knowing that they were advancing, the men did not mind having to march about a mile-and-a-half from the position to Banthéville after having just come from there. The weather was cold, clear, and windy, and pleasant for marching. We met the carriage of the captured French general staff officer escorted by Uhlans, who were cheered as they passed. For every one could guess that this was an important capture. Whilst on the road the Corps Commander, who marched at the head of the main body of the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard, received several important reports from the cavalry. The division halted in front of Buzancy. Along the road near Sivry-devant-Buzancy there was a height which afforded an extensive view to the north and north-west. Here, as I stated in my last letter, I observed with my telescope hostile troops coming from Boulton-aux-Bois, passing through Germont and turning off at the cross-roads towards Authie, which led me to believe that they were marching on Le Chesne and retiring to the north-west. Though they were about 5 miles away I was able to count the battalions, and in the course of a few hours calculated their number at forty. You can now verify the correctness of my calculation by comparison with the "Ordre de Bataille" of the French army, according to which the 7th French Corps (Douay) consisted of 36 battalions of infantry, 2 rifle battalions, 4½ engineer companies, together more than 39 battalions of infantry.

Before we had been there long, we heard the sound of guns on our right rear, almost at our back. The sound of guns in war always attracts attention. It makes a queer impression when heard from your rear, with an enemy of forty battalions in your front, whilst we numbered only thirty, which had been reduced to almost half their strength by battle and marching. The staff

map showed that the road turned sharply to the left from the height towards Buzancy, and then ran north-west. In view of the general north-westerly direction of the march of our whole army, the place whence the sound proceeded was not in our rear, but on our right flank. It might be at Nouart. At any rate the General Commanding did not think it advisable to continue the march. You know that he inquired whether assistance was wanted. It was only when he received a reply in the negative that he ordered the main body of the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard to proceed. About three hours were thus spent after we reached this height shortly after 12 o'clock.

During this time we observed from the knoll on the left of the road, as from the box of a theatre, what was taking place before us. Buzancy lay at our feet. We had an extensive view over the undulating country, which appeared from our elevated position to be a level plain. Towards the west the view was limited by the wooded mountains in rear of Boulton-aux-Bois, out of which town the enemy's troops continued to pour. They were marching in two parallel columns; one of them therefore must have marched off the road, a circumstance that could not help increasing their fatigue. Bar and Harricourt were visible in the north-west of the apparent plain. Our advance guard occupied these places, yet the enemy took no steps to oppose them. The Cavalry Division was taking up a rendezvous position beyond Harricourt. The three horse batteries were there, but did not fire a shot. Farther still we saw single scouts of our Uhlans hanging on to the columns of the enemy. Every now and then whole detachments of the enemy halted (whether companies or sections could not be distinguished), formed line and fired volleys against these single horsemen, and then fell back only to return immediately like a swarm of flies on a summer evening. Further north-west, in the direction of Le Chesne, the view was lost in the grey distance. Towards the north we saw the church spire of St. Pierre-

mont rising like the point of a needle, to the right of Fossé the view was limited by the wooded height to the north-east called Bois de la Folie, so that nothing of the events at Nouart, indicated by the sound of the guns, could be seen.

After 3 o'clock a reply arrived from the army headquarters which, as you know, stated that the XII. Corps did not need the assistance of the Guard Corps. It was also stated that it was not intended to attack the enemy to-day from Bar, but only to maintain the position between Bar and Buzancy, nor was the Cavalry Division to advance farther to-day, but merely to keep touch with the enemy, should he retire. The corps commander ordered accordingly, that the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard was to occupy Buzancy, Bar and Harricourt, seize the heights beyond the last named place, and that the troops who could not find shelter in the villages should bivouac on the right of the road. The space on the left of the road was to be left clear for the other Division. Corps Artillery and Ammunition Columns were directed to Sivry as ordered early in the morning. Corps Headquarters proceeded to Buzancy. The Chief of the Staff was sent to the front to give verbal information to the 1st Infantry Division and to the Cavalry Division of the Guard. I was directed to accompany him to select the artillery position in case we were attacked. On reaching the Cavalry Division in front I was able to solve the apparent puzzle and rectify my mistake. The country was by no means so flat as it had appeared from the height near Buzancy. The whole of the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard was in a hollow and out of sight of the enemy. The Cavalry Division north of Harricourt was also covered by a height on which the generals had halted. From there to the hostile columns the distance was 2000, or at the most, 2500 paces. The temptation was great to advance the three horse batteries on to the heights and harass the enemy's march eastward with our shells, the more so as the Supreme Command of

our army intended to prevent such an eastward march altogether. But the instructions from Corps Headquarters made us resist the temptation, however effective the fire of our guns against these dense masses would have been. Only our Uhlans continued to swarm about the enemy and to provoke him. Every now and then a hostile battery would come into position, but without opening fire. The enemy, it seems, merely intended to remain in readiness to repulse a cavalry charge. At the time I rather regretted that our artillery was not permitted to throw the hostile columns into confusion. Strategically it was more correct, however, not to do so. The enemy did not seem to have the faintest idea that a whole infantry division was less than a mile and a half away. If our artillery fire had provoked him to take the offensive against us and drive our artillery away, the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard, barely 8000 strong, might have been crushed by superior numbers before it could be supported. Clausewitz's definition of strategy found here a very appropriate application, "Strategy is the utilization of battle." Since we could not make any use of a battle, it was more correct, strategically, not to engage. Fighting for the sake of fighting may often prove harmful, though it is not invariably wrong; for it is always better to advance on the enemy ten times too often than to neglect to do so once when a good opportunity is offered.

You will perhaps point out to me the difference in the action of the XII. and Guard Corps. The former at Nouart attacked, the latter at Harricourt did not. You will perhaps say that one of the two must have committed an error. But the XII. Corps had to fight to frustrate the designs of the enemy who was marching on Stenay. As soon as this purpose was accomplished and the enemy abandoned the march to Stenay and retired to Beaumont, the XII. Corps was no longer obliged to fight and broke off the action and did not even deign to answer the enemy's guns which kept up their fire until after dark.

The Guard Corps did not have to bring the enemy to a halt, for, as you will presently see, he camped before our very eyes. The corps therefore abstained altogether from an engagement and thus acted strategically correctly, the more so since the enemy, who had been observed by the Guard Corps, was too far from the Meuse to cross that day. The Guard Corps therefore had no necessity to fight in order to prevent him from so doing.

What puzzled me was that the enemy did not use any cavalry to drive away our troublesome scouts, and it remains a mystery to me to-day, for according to the "Ordre de Bataille," the 7th Corps, which was in our front, had 12 squadrons. A single French squadron had advanced from Germont before my arrival, but had been immediately driven away by our cavalry. The strategical importance of cavalry was that day clearly demonstrated to me, for while we were able to count every man of the enemy, the latter had no knowledge that we were within cannon range in far inferior strength.

I also observed the road covered by the enemy's masses, and recognized my error in having thought that the enemy was marching to Le Chesne while I was on the height in front of Buzancy. I had observed from that height that he left the road to Buzancy north-east of Germont, and took the road to the left to Le Chesne. Now I observed him leaving this road at Authe and turning to the right and north-east in the valley of the stream at St. Pierremont. Whilst I was watching this march, my attention was attracted by a white glimmer covering the height on which the rock of St. Pierremont is situated. Through my telescope I recognized the tents of the enemy's camp which the first arrived troops were pitching. This was, and still remains, a mystery to me. You will also find it incomprehensible how any one could camp so close to the enemy, surrounded by his cavalry, without taking measures for security. To me it seems all the more surprising since the same corps two days before

had passed a whole night in readiness near Vouziers, because hostile cavalry had appeared at Grand Pré, 9 miles distant. It can only be explained by the carelessness frequently shown by French commanders in former wars and which perhaps rendered the surprise near Hainau possible on the 26th March, 1813. The carelessness shown by the 5th French Corps during the night, resulted the next morning in the worst consequences for the French army.

We for our part did not anticipate any attack by night from the enemy whom we had observed all day moving across our front and who had now camped, and we became convinced that in spite of his proximity in far superior numbers we should not be molested. Moreover our cavalry remained in close contact with him and would report every movement. We could therefore rest securely, but must be ready early in the morning. I returned to the Corps Headquarters at Buzancy shortly before sundown with this report.

Marshal MacMahon was informed on the evening of the 28th August that Stenay was occupied by Saxon troops, 15,000 strong, and that the bridge over the Meuse at that point had been destroyed. He therefore abandoned the movement on Stenay, which, it appears, Faily had been ordered the evening before to occupy on the 29th August, and decided to turn to the north, cross the Meuse at Mouzon and Rémyilly and march on Metz by way of Carignan. This plan seems to have been greatly influenced by the fact that the French Army had no bridge train. I am at a loss what to say of the thoughtlessness with which the French War Ministry urged this large army to such a hazardous offensive in a region intersected by many rivers, without providing any bridging material. MacMahon's movements were thus dependent on the bold enterprise of any hostile scouting party which might destroy the bridge over some insignificant river, imperilling his whole army if that happened

in its rear. The fact also that the points of the enemy's cavalry had already seized the road from Vouziers to Stenay, influenced the Marshal's plan. You very properly ask why did not his cavalry divisions drive away these advanced parties of hostile cavalry? We know where they were directed to. The Marshal ordered during the night, 28th—29th August, that on the 29th the

1st Corps was to march to Raucourt.

12th Corps „ Mouzon.

7th Corps „ La Besace.

5th Corps „ Beaumont.

The 1st Corps reached its destination. Its rear guard, as we know, molested, pursued and delayed by the Prussian 6th Cavalry Division, did not arrive until late at night. Bonnemain's Cavalry Division bivouacked by the side of the 1st Corps. The 12th Corps crossed the Meuse at Mouzon and halted there. Margueritte's Cavalry Division crossed near this point and advanced to Vaux and Moulins, to the south and east respectively. The 7th Corps failed to reach its destination. It was delayed, first by a false report, then by the swarms of scouts of the Cavalry Division of the Guard, by a march, which lasted from 10 a.m. until evening, besides being frequently interrupted by the bold action of the Uhlans, and did not get beyond Ochles and Pierremont, where it bivouacked, having only advanced 9 miles. The order to march to Beaumont instead of Stenay was not received by the 5th Corps on the 29th August at all. The general staff officer carrying the order fell into the hands of the enemy, being captured by Zimmermann's squadron on the road. Faily was meanwhile marching with his corps towards Beaufort and Beauclair in two columns, in obedience to his former instructions, to wait there, as ordered, for instructions from the Marshal to cross the Meuse at Stenay. On the march the corps encountered the advance guard of the German XII. Corps, which brought about the engagement at Nouart.

The flank attack of an advance guard of 6 battalions and 4 batteries compelled an army corps of more than 32 battalions to relinquish their march eastward, and to front to the south. This seems very astonishing when stated in this manner, but does not at all reflect on General de Failly's conduct; on the contrary it was very natural, if we accept the fact that the French army did not employ its cavalry for the purpose of getting information about the enemy. The French knew that the Crown Prince of Saxony was approaching from Verdun with 50,000 men. For two days they had been worried by the enemy's cavalry. Now they are taken in flank at Nouart. Failly could not know what lay behind that advance guard of 6 battalions. He could not very well leave a flank detachment to oppose them, and continue his march to attack Stenay, where 15,000 Germans had been reported on the previous evening, and additional troops might have arrived during the morning of the 29th August. Had he done so he would have run the risk of having to face simultaneously considerable forces in two directions (east and south); always a dangerous situation. Nor could he expect reinforcements during the day, because the other corps were too far away. Nothing was therefore left but to deploy his whole force against the nearest enemy—towards the south—and restrict himself to mere observation towards the east. He could not do this without interrupting his march eastward. It was very natural, therefore, that the least pressure on his flank should bring the whole operation to a stop. During a subsequent period of the same war we witnessed a similar effect, when General von Werder brought Bourbaki's entire army to a halt by his attack on Villersexel in January, 1871, and thereby gained the time necessary to anticipate the enemy on the Lisaine. During the development of the action at Nouart, General de Failly received MacMahon's second order directing him to move on Beaumont, whereupon he broke off the engagement, leaving a rear guard

of two brigades to hold the ground until the evening, when they were to gain Beaumont by a night march.

In examining the measures taken by the French leaders on the 29th August, I must confess that they call for much criticism. We must leave out of consideration the fact that a continuation of the march in an easterly direction would be ruinous. That question was settled. MacMahon had submitted to the orders of the Council of Ministers, and *had* to march to effect a junction with Bazaine. On this basis we must place ourselves if we wish to determine what he ought to have done. He abandoned the road Vouziers-Buzancy-Stenay, because 15,000 Saxons were said to be at Stenay, and because that road was rendered insecure by the points of the enemy's cavalry. He then selected the roads to Mouzon and Rémyilly for crossing his corps over to the further bank of the Meuse. Was that correct? I cannot imagine that the report of 15,000 Saxons being at Stenay was furnished by his patrols, for none of them reached Stenay. It was a mere rumour brought to him by patriotic civilians. Actual contact with the enemy would have informed him that there were only 6 weak battalions there. The German cavalry, that reached the above-mentioned road on the 28th August, consisted of patrols and isolated squadrons. Having known for several days that the Crown Prince of Saxony had been near Verdun on the 23rd, MacMahon might have inferred that he could not reach Bazaine without a battle with this portion of the German armies. He could not possibly expect to steal, with an army of 150,000 men, round the right flank of an enemy, who was so close, and whose cavalry observed him daily on the march. MacMahon had not merely to march towards Bazaine, but to assist the latter to escape, and he might have known that he would have to fight in any case. Nothing could have been more opportune for

him than to defeat the Crown Prince of Saxony whilst isolated. Had he used his cavalry to reconnoitre towards the latter, the situation would have become clear to him. As matters stood on the evening of the 28th August, the inaction of his cavalry was an accomplished fact, which could not be undone. If we base our ideas on the events as they represented themselves to the Marshal at this time, we find that he had to do with a hostile cavalry screen close on his right flank, and with a weak detachment of the enemy—say 15,000 men—barring his road at Stenay. If he retired to the north he would have to make a detour and march on an arc, giving the enemy the opportunity of anticipating him with still greater ease by marching along the chord of that arc. Moreover passing the Meuse at Mouzon and Remilly would eventually lead his army to Carignan and to the single road Carignan-Montmédy, where it would have to continue its march in a column, five days' marches from the head to the rear, parallel and close to the Belgian frontier. MacMahon could not possibly expect that the enemy would remain inactive all this time. The latter was bound to overtake his column. But the farther to the north the collision took place, the more dangerous it would be for the French army, because then it would have to fight with its back toward the Belgian frontier. All this should have suggested to MacMahon to advance to the south on the 29th August and seize Stenay for the purpose of opening and holding the road through the latter place. The situation was similar to that of Bazaine on the morning of the 17th August, when the latter might have secured his retreat to Verdun by an advance to the south. It was equally important to the Supreme Command of the German army to avoid a decisive action on the 29th August, as for the French to bring on a battle on that day, if the march was to be continued to the east.

I have not the least intention of merely criticizing the Marshal's actions. But I think we may conclude, that

when it has been recognized that battle, however inopportune, cannot be avoided, it is better to seek it and to attack, thus preserving the initiative, and the consequent advantages, than to retire and exhaust the troops by long detours, relinquishing the initiative to the enemy and disheartening your own troops. Continually avoiding the enemy must have an adverse effect on the spirits of the men.

I think, therefore, if MacMahon had seriously intended to carry out the orders of the Council of Ministers he would have ordered the 7th Corps to advance early on the 29th August from Boulton-aux-Bois through Buzancy in the direction of Bayonville, and the 5th Corps from Belval through Nouart and Tilly, both taking the offensive, the 12th Corps from La Besace to advance by Beaumont and take Stenay, the 1st Corps to take position near Belval, in reserve. The fact that the Army had no bridging material, cannot be accepted as sufficient reason for not attacking Stenay. The advance guard of the German XII. Corps found the water so shallow there as to make the defence of the place difficult, and the French general staff may be supposed to have been equally well informed of the nature of their own rivers. We have seen in the campaign of 1859 and on the days preceding the 29th August, that half-measures invariably result when a commander is compelled to carry out a plan of operations which he believes hopeless.

Nor was the Marshal, so far as we know his intentions, much in earnest on the evening of the 28th August in carrying out the plan of operations forced on him by the Cabinet. He may have hoped that the strategical situation on the 29th and 30th August would convince even the Council of Ministers at Paris that it was impossible to reach Bazaine, and that then he would still be able to move his army back to Mézières. Though he may not have expressed or even entertained this hope, still its existence in a vague form may have caused him to with-

draw to the north. Had he had reliable information from the inhabitants that the Crown Prince of Prussia had reached only the line Varennes-Vienne-Virginy on the 28th August with his foremost corps, he would have had no reason to believe that his Army would bar the road to Mezières so speedily, if he judged the marching powers of the German troops by the performance of his own.

It appears that the marching powers of the French army corps was not inconsiderably impaired by the defective system of orders practised by the general staff. We have already seen how the army corps were exhausted on the 28th August by an insignificant advance, and also that the late arrival of orders issued during the night was an additional cause, as the troops had been put in motion as directed in the original orders, and therefore had to make counter-marches. Again please note on the 29th August how late the army corps were put in motion. The 7th Corps did not march until 10 a.m. The 5th Corps marched in the morning in two columns from the vicinity of Belval and Bois-des-Dames to Beaufort and Beauclair. The advance guard of the German XII. Corps, which reached Villers-devant-Dun at 8 a.m., encountered, on resuming its march on Nouart, the southern one of these two columns (the one marching from Bois-des-Dames on Beauclair) in the vicinity of Champy, i.e. more than four miles from Villers. It may therefore have been about 11 a.m. But Champy and Bois-des-Dames form one continuous village. The French corps, therefore, could only just have started. The opinion formerly prevailed that the French did not care about marching early in the day. Various writers on the wars of the first Napoleon have pointed this out. It may be that the custom still prevailed. The fact, however, that orders were not promptly transmitted, seems to me to be proved by the time and place of capture of the French general staff officer who was carrying the counter-orders to march on to Beaumont to General de Faily. Captain

Zimmermann had advanced beyond the line of outposts at 4 a.m. The officer's patrol which had captured a French commissariat officer at Germont, was driven back by the Chasseurs escorting the general staff officer referred to; the squadron coming up in support overpowered the latter's escort. Considering the distance of Germont from the outposts of the cavalry, and the time spent by the Uhlans of the Guard in patrolling and pursuing and being pursued by the Chasseurs, 7 a.m. may be assumed as the earliest possible hour at which the capture could have taken place. But at that hour De Failly should have had the order long ago, if the corps was to be spared counter-marches. Another question arises, how did this officer get to Germont, which lies a considerable distance off the direct road from Stonne (the Marshal's headquarters) to Belval? This question can be answered only by the surmise that he had been sent to Boulton-aux-Bois to the 7th Corps, and was to proceed thence to Bois-des-Dames with the orders for the 5th Corps. Such a proceeding would have wasted a great deal of time. The importance and urgency of the matter required a separate order to be sent to each corps. An officer riding from Stonne to Belval direct would not have fallen into the enemy's hands at daybreak on the 29th August. From these facts you see very plainly how apparently small details of the duties of the general staff affect the execution of the strategical decisions. It is no mere pedantry to urge again and again the utmost precision in these details. It is only when they are done accurately, correctly, punctually and practically executed, i.e. if the gearing of the strategic machine acts properly, that the execution of strategical plans can be relied upon.

It also appears from the Official Account that De Failly had been directed to wait for orders at Beaufort and Beauclair before proceeding to the attack of Stenay. This had no effect, since De Failly was for the present unable to complete the march because of the attack on his

flank, and because he received the counter-order to march to Beaumont. I mention this point solely because it throws light on the system of issuing orders prevailing in the French army. At Beaufort and Beauclair De Failly would have been close in front of Stenay. Why should he wait for orders before attacking Stenay? If a reconnaissance gave fair promise of a successful attack, loss of time could only diminish his chances. The seizure of Stenay would have been useful to the French army under any circumstances. It almost seems as though the French Commander-in-Chief had been in the habit of prescribing to his subordinates every detail, as was the custom in the Austrian army in 1859. I say "it almost seems," for in order to maintain this assertion I should have to consult the original orders, which I am unable to do. If my surmise be correct, we are able to explain the inaction of the cavalry division, which was at Beaumont two days before, and failed to send a detachment to Belval. Many other things which we shall discuss later on, will then also admit of explanation. When the most minute detail is laid down daily by the Supreme Command, a subordinate leader will only exceptionally feel authorized to do even the most insignificant thing on his own responsibility.

A French army corps here for once used two roads instead of one, I mean De Failly's Corps on the march to Beaufort and Beauclair, for the purpose of advancing quicker and with less fatigue.

THIRTIETH LETTER.

THE 30TH AUGUST—BEAUMONT.

ON the evening of the 29th August the Headquarters of the German Army at Grand Pré had the advantage of being fully informed about the enemy's position. Mac-Mahon's orders of march for the 30th August were found on the person of the staff officer captured by the 3rd Uhlan Regiment of the Guard. They confirmed the view entertained at the Royal Headquarters as to the movements of the French corps. The 7th French Corps did not arrive at its destination; the Guard Corps, however, had observed its movements, and reported that the corps was pitching its tents near St. Pierremont in the evening. The German XII. Corps had been engaged with the enemy's 5th Corps near Champy. If the latter failed to march to Beaumont on this day in pursuance of its orders, it would have to pass the night between Champy and Beaumont. The reports of these two corps were verified and supplemented by two general staff officers (von Bronsart and von Brandenstein) detailed for that purpose from the Royal Headquarters. The fact that the 6th Cavalry Division had wrested Voncq from the French rear guard, rendered it probable that the 1st French Army Corps had completed its march to Raucourt as ordered. Reports of our own cavalry regarding the French 12th Corps were alone wanting to fully confirm the execution of the French dispositions. But the German patrols could not well have come in contact with that Corps. There was, however, no reason to believe that it had not

marched to Mouzon. The Headquarters of the German Army were thus enabled to form almost the same view of the situation of the opposing forces on the evening of the 29th August, as is shown in the sketch given in the Official Account.

The hostile Army was now known to be marching in an easterly direction. Two army corps were standing in the vicinity of St. Pierremont and Beaumont, sword to sword, as it were, with the Meuse Army. The two other corps must be farther north on the river near Mouzon, and one of them might have crossed it. Of the German troops two army corps (Guard and XII.) of the Meuse Army were at Buzancy and Nouart, 2 and 7 miles respectively from the two first-mentioned southern French corps, the IV. Corps in reserve at Bayonville, 2 miles further south. Three miles from this portion of the enemy stood the I. Bavarian (Sommerance) and the V. Army Corps with the Wurttemberg Division (Grand Pré). The II. Bavarian (Cornay) and the XI. Corps (Monthois) were 19 miles from the enemy, and the VI. Corps alone was unable to reach the enemy on the 30th August by a forced march from Vienne. Three corps of the Meuse Army were thus sure of overtaking the two southern corps of the enemy on the 30th in whatever direction they might march; for the depth of the columns of their strong corps was at least 14 miles, without counting the transport. The Meuse Army would therefore certainly be able to attack and hold them fast on that day. In the meantime the I. Bavarian and the V. Corps with the Wurttemberg Division could come up in support, and in case of need we might at the very least count on having the II. Bavarian Corps, the XI. Corps, and the Wurttemberg Division available as reserves in the evening of the 30th August. The attack must be proceeded with as soon as the required forces could be placed in readiness. Speedy action was necessary, whatever the enemy might undertake on the 30th. If he intended to continue his

march eastward, the only day on which it was still possible to reach him on the left bank of the Meuse must be utilized. If he meant to relinquish his eastward march on the 30th and to retire on Mezières, then this day, on which the two southern corps at least could be overtaken, defeated, and driven northward, must likewise be made use of. In either case the enemy had the choice of abandoning one half of his troops engaged in battle with a superior enemy to destruction, in order to continue the march with the other half, or to give battle under the most unfavourable circumstances, facing south and with his back against the Belgian frontier. To move in an easterly direction could lead to no good purpose, for he could not expect to accomplish with one half of his army what he was unable to effect with the whole. A frontal attack, therefore, from the south in a northerly direction, could only result favourably for the German Armies, and was thus highly desirable. One day lost, and the enemy might escape. You see, therefore, that the enemy's fate was sealed if the German Armies attacked on the 30th August. The number of the enemy's forces which might yet be extricated from this situation now depended merely on those accidents which in war cannot be foreseen.

The Supreme Command of the German Army did not hesitate a moment to seize the opportunity offered for a decisive action, and ordered a frontal attack from south to north. Though seizing their opportunity with decision, the Headquarters acted with great caution. The Meuse Army might have been ordered to attack the enemy in their front, the support of the corps of the Third Army being promised, mentioning at the same time their hours of marching. In that case the Meuse Army might have had to fight hand to hand for several hours with an enemy superior in numbers before support arrived, like the X. and III. Corps on the 16th August at Vionville and Mars la Tour. Even in this case the final result could hardly be doubtful, but would probably

have cost greater sacrifices. For this reason the order issued at Grand Pré at 11 p.m. on the 29th August ordered a simultaneous attack by both armies, and directed the Meuse Army not to cross the line Fossé-Beauclair before 10 a.m., because the leading corps of the Third Army could not arrive in line on the left before that hour, and ordered the latter to start early and be in readiness to support the attack of the Crown Prince of Saxony with two corps, for which purpose the right wing was to move on Beaumont *via* Buzancy, the left wing on Le Chesne. But the Guard Corps was already at Buzancy. If the Third Army was to take its full share in the offensive, the road through Buzancy would have to be kept clear for it. For this reason the Army of the Meuse was ordered to move the Guard Corps off that road by 8 a.m., and to use it as a reserve. That part of the order which directed the left wing of the Third Army to move on Le Chesne, shows clearly that even now it was intended, after defeating the enemy in the north, that his line of retreat to the interior of France should be threatened, or if possible entirely cut off.

The Headquarters of the Third Army did not content itself with simply obeying the orders received. The two Bavarian Corps were ordered to move on Beaumont, through Buzancy, Bar, Sommauthe, the V. Corps on their left through Briquenay and Authe-sur-Oches, the Wurttemberg Division through Longwé, Boulton-aux-Bois and Chatillon, and the XI. Corps through Vouziers and Quatre Champs on Le Chesne. The VI. Corps was ordered up to Vouziers. All corps were to march at 6 a.m., throwing out their advance guards at a correspondingly earlier hour.

By this arrangement the Third Army were able to bring up $3\frac{1}{2}$ army corps abreast of the Meuse army by 10 a.m.; for if we calculate that these masses covered 10 miles in four hours, then by the roads mentioned above these would have arrived about this time: the head of the main

body of the I. Bavarian Corps, coming from Sommerance, close to the left of Fossé; the V. Corps north of Authe from Grand Pré; the Wurttemberg Division at Boulton-aux-Bois from Grand Pré, and the XI. Corps south of Quatre Champs from Monthois. The II. Bavarian Corps followed in rear of the I. in reserve. For the first attack there were this 5½ army corps available (XII., IV., I. Bavarian, V., Wurttemberg Division), while two army corps (Guard and II. Bavarian) followed in reserve. By directing the XI. Corps on Le Chesne the latter had to march only 14 miles instead of 19 against the enemy north of Buzancy. If Le Chesne was evacuated by the enemy, the XI. Corps and Wurttemberg Division would threaten, in the most effective manner, his lines of communication and retreat. On the 30th August the 5th and 6th Cavalry Divisions were thrown out to Tourteron and Voncq to harass the communications of the French army and to watch the enemy, who at the same time began to show himself again at Reims. The two other cavalry divisions (2nd and 4th) were placed in readiness in rear of the corps of the first line (north of Buzancy and Chatillon respectively), i.e. in order to have them at hand for the battle.

It is very interesting to examine the various dispositions here made for the cavalry divisions after their strategical action in screening and reconnoitring had come to an end and the day of decision appeared to have come. Four cavalry divisions, two with each army, viz. 12th, Guard, 2nd, and 4th, followed the army corps for tactical action, two cavalry divisions were sent out to the left round the right flank of the enemy to molest him and continue their strategical action. Two cavalry regiments (the Saxon 2nd Reiter Regiment and the Zieten Hussars) were to turn his other flank and perform there the strategical duties of observation.

A reconnaissance by the two last-named cavalry regiments had ascertained late on the 29th August that,

although Beaumont was still held by the enemy, the latter had crossed the Meuse and sent troops as far as Inor. The Official Account states that the Headquarters of the Meuse Army inferred from these reports, and from the whole action of the enemy, that he intended to concentrate his entire force next day on the right bank of the river. A speedy advance, therefore, would render it possible to overtake and defeat portions of the hostile forces on the left bank before they could complete their passage. It may be added that measures initiating an advance were taken on the evening of the 29th August. I know from other sources that the Crown Prince of Saxony was determined to at once attack the enemy in front of him on the morning of the 30th regardless of strength or position, in order to compel him to act on the defensive and to prevent the continuation of his march to the east.

Here again we see the subordinate army commanders acting spontaneously and on their own responsibility in harmonious co-operation with the intentions of the Royal Headquarters. The Third Army had been ordered to support the Meuse Army on the 30th August with two corps. It placed 3½ corps in first line, while a fourth followed so closely that it might have been used as a reserve in case of necessity on the same evening. The Meuse Army resolved to hold the enemy by attacking him, before orders to that effect had been received, because this action was known to be intended by the Royal Headquarters.

This harmony of thought and action teaches us a great deal that is useful for every commander. It was produced, on the one hand, by the system of orders adhered to by the Royal Headquarters, which, on principle, issued only general instructions to the subordinate leaders, informing them of its intentions and views, and abstained from interference with details pertaining to the lower sphere of action without urgent cause; on the

other by the adoption by the subordinate leaders of the ideas of their superiors, and of a thorough consideration of the causes and views which might have influenced them in issuing these orders. If the Supreme Command had so framed its orders as to prescribe every detail and reduce the army leaders to mechanical obedience, the latter would not have dared to act independently. If on receiving orders they had not carefully considered the situation and views of their superiors, they would not have been able to act in accordance with the wishes of the latter. The lesson which we draw from this applies to every grade down to the captain and lieutenant. A commander must never enter into more details than is absolutely necessary. He should never interfere without good cause with the sphere of the subordinate. By these means subordinates are trained for spontaneous and independent action. This action on the subordinate's responsibility should never be assumed pleasure, but should always be based on the reflection and question: "What was my superior's intention regarding this order?" "What may have been his views on the subject?" It is thus only that dead, mechanical obedience is avoided and self-acting obedience, combined with initiative, is produced. I have touched on these two points more than once, but repetition in this case does no harm; they cannot be impressed on your mind too often. I will not cite instances where a different method of command paralyzed the liberty of action of subordinates, because I should have to repeat things that have often been mentioned. You may say that the German Supreme Command was fortunate in having subordinates of whom it was known that they would invariably carry out its intentions in their own actions, and that not every leader is in that position. I should reply that it is only in this manner that subordinates are enabled to fully develop their independence of action.

The conception of the Commander of the Meuse Army

was confirmed in the course of the night by a report, that the enemy, who had left a rear guard against the XII. Corps north of Nouart, had withdrawn the same from Belval and Champy to Beaumont. Meanwhile the above-mentioned order, issued from Royal Headquarters at 11 p.m. on the 29th, had arrived. Orders were therefore issued at 3 a.m. for the IV. Corps to advance to Fossé and Nouart, one division of the XII. Corps to assemble at Beauclair, the other west of the Bois de Nouart. The last-named points were to be reached by 10 a.m. At 6 a.m. a second order was issued, which assigned one road each to the four divisions of the two (XII. and Guard) corps, viz. :—

1. Beauclair—Laneuville—Beaumont.
2. Bois de Nouart—Beaufort—Bois de Dieulet—Ferme de la Belle Tour.
3. Nouart—Grand Champy—Bois de Belval—Belle Tour.
4. Fossé—Belval—Bois de Petit Dieulet—Beaumont.

The Guard Corps received orders to take up a position in reserve west of Nouart.

The cavalry division of the XII. Corps was to follow one division on the right flank. At 8 a.m. the commander of the Meuse Army assembled the corps commanders at Bayonville, and gave detailed orders for the attack by word of mouth.

The steps taken by the German Headquarters and the commanders of the two armies brought about the battle of Beaumont. I pass by the tactical details, as outside the scope of our discussions. The battle bore the general character of a frontal battle, in which the German troops drove back those portions of the French army which were within reach and those which came to their support, and pursued them in a northerly direction as far as Mouzon. The action opened with the surprise of a division of the 5th French Corps, south of Beaumont, by the Prussian IV. Corps in broad daylight. The French troops rallied

as quickly as possible, and then offered an obstinate resistance, which was broken by the arrival of the XII. German and I. Bavarian Corps on both their flanks. The last division of the French 7th Corps, which had not been able to commence its march, attacked the Bavarian Corps, which now turned on this new opponent, beat him off, and on the same evening drove another division of the same corps from Raucourt. The head of the Prussian V. Corps came into line on the left of the Bavarian Corps. The enemy was pursued as far as Mouzon, where portions of the hostile 12th Corps endeavoured to cover the retreat, but were themselves in part carried away, until finally the last French troops had retired across the Meuse, which now separated the combatants. The result was the defeat of the French 5th Corps, in which considerable portions of the 12th and 7th Corps shared. It may be assumed that more than one-third, almost one-half, of the French Army was affected by this defeat (*viz.* the whole 5th Corps, 2 divisions of the 7th Corps, 1 infantry and 1 cavalry brigade of the 12th Corps); 42 guns and other material fell into the hands of the victors.

During the battle the Meuse Army brought up the Guard Corps to Beaumont, and the Third Army moved the II. Bavarian Corps up in rear of the I., and the XI. Corps and Wurttemberg division to Brioules, so that towards the end of the fight 4½ German army corps were in readiness (Guard, II. Bavarian, V., XI., and the Wurttemberg Division); they were not used, for the reason that success was assured and pursuit in full swing. Had MacMahon brought up all his forces to the support of those attacked (and the German commanders had to expect that he would do so), victory would still have remained with the Germans on account of these 4½ fresh corps.

“To march divided and fight united, is the highest art in strategy.” These winged words of acknowledged authority, which I have quoted more than once, were

fully realized in the battle of Beaumont by the German commanders. The 7½ army corps started on the 30th August, on a front of 28 miles (from Monthois to Beaufort), and concentrated for battle on a front of 9 miles (from Letanne to Stonne), where they might have been employed simultaneously. The VI. Corps was, as we know, somewhat in rear, and reached Vouziers on that day.

The action of the Guard Corps was uneventful, because it remained in reserve during the battle; still instructive lessons are furnished by its action, chiefly in confirmation of conclusions repeatedly drawn.

The Corps Commander ordered, shortly before midnight on the 29th August, that the troops should cook in time to be in readiness to march from their bivouacs at 9 a.m. Reports of the events of the preceding night were to be sent in by 5.30 a.m., and empty wagons with straw were to be held in readiness to follow the troops.

These arrangements are apparently (and so far as I remember) a result of the "preparatory measures" (see Official Account, Vol. ii., Part i., p. 240) ordered by the commander of the Meuse Army on his own authority, with a view to a rapid advance to overtake and defeat parts of the hostile forces before they could complete their passage to the right bank of the Meuse. He must therefore have intended to assign to the XII. and IV. Corps the same four parallel roads, which were in fact assigned to them afterwards, and to order the Guard Corps to take the offensive by Bar, Harricourt, and Sommauthe, against Beaumont or against the enemy who had appeared at Pierremont (7th French Corps). The Meuse Army, however, as we know, received orders from Royal Headquarters, requiring new dispositions at 3 a.m., directing the army to halt until 10 a.m., and in particular to clear the road Sommerance—Buzancy—Harricourt—Som-

mauthe for the I. Bavarian Corps. The Guard Corps could advance no further in the enemy's direction, and had to give way to its right (east), and move as a reserve to the rear of the other two corps of the Meuse Army.

Pursuant to orders from the Army Headquarters, the following dispositions were issued by the Guard Corps at 4.30 a.m. on the 30th August:—

The Guard Corps is to clear the road Buzancy—Beaumont for the troops of the Third Army, and to take up a rendezvous position east of Buzancy, between that place and the Bois de la Folie.¹ Only the advanced troops of the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard were to halt until the arrival of the leading troops of the Third Army.

In this rendezvous position the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard was to occupy the space east of Buzancy and in front of the Bois de la Folie; in its rear the Cavalry Division of the Guard, its right on the road Buzancy—Bayonville; the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard near Thénorgues, to the east of the village and of the road Grand Pré—Thénorgues—Buzancy. The wagons were sent back to Bayonville, Corps Artillery and heavy trains to remain halted. Cooking to be done after taking up the position.

At 6.30 the order arrived to attack, which had been issued by the army commander at 6 a.m., and with which we are familiar. The Guard Corps was to take up a position in reserve on the heights west of Nouart, where the Crown Prince of Saxony was expected to arrive at 10 a.m.

Here you have a case in the German army of 1870 of a commanding general being obliged to issue three different dispositions for his corps within 6½ hours. If you take the trouble to follow the orders on the general

¹ This wood lies about a mile to the east of Buzancy, on the high road to Nouart.

staff map, you will see that the second order alone may be called a counter-order prohibiting an advance against the enemy, which had not been ordered at all by the first disposition, which prescribed a position of readiness, merely indicating the possibility of an advance. The third disposition ordered the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard to move on Nouart by the high road, followed by the Corps Artillery, the latter by the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard, and lastly by the Cavalry Division of the Guard.

You can see by the sequence and content of these orders, as well as from the time of the day when they are issued, what great exertions of mind and body are sometimes required on the part of the officers of the general staff, the motive power of the strategical machine. They ride, march, and reconnoitre in day-time, and are frequently obliged at night to devote hour after hour to study and plan new dispositions. The aides-de-camp, too, must possess endurance, a keen sense of duty, strength, and be well mounted. What is the use of the best dispositions if they do not reach their destination?

We were all looking forward with pleasure to the morning of the 30th August, when we should surprise and fall on the unsuspecting enemy, whose bivouacs lay so close to our front at St. Pierremont. Having at last reached the foe, after such exhausting forced marches, we hoped to gather the fruits of all our hardships in one glorious day. The order to take up a position in reserve was a great blow to us. The general opinion was, that the Guard Corps, as such, was to be spared. History has handed down to us how the Prussian Guard became unpopular with the whole army in the War of Liberation, because it had only fought at Gross-Goerschen on the 2nd May, 1813, and not again until the battle of Montmartre toward the end of March, 1814. We also knew how the French had mocked at their Guards before Sebastopol: "*La garde meurt (ici), mais ne se*

rend pas (aux tranchées).”¹ In 1866 the Guard Corps had played a prominent part in the battles. Were we again to be constantly in reserve after the first battle in this war, as in 1813? We became quite dejected. As I now see the situation, it is plain to me, as I explained to you before, that the Guard Corps had to quit its road to enable the Royal Headquarters to bring up the corps of the Third Army for the battle. Their intention to do so is proof of much forethought and wisdom, for it was impossible to know whether MacMahon would bring his whole Army to the support of the 5th and 7th Corps or not. In that case only the four roads mentioned were available for the Meuse Army, which made use of them and found some to be rather difficult. There was the choice of letting the Guard or IV. Corps move up into the first line by the two roads on the left wing. Though the Guard Corps was nearer to the line Fossé—Belval—Beaumont than the IV. Corps, the latter was much nearer the line Nouart—Grand Champy—Belle Tour, and could throw its entire strength into the battle much sooner than the Guard Corps. It was therefore more natural and correct to employ the IV. Corps in the first, and the Guard Corps in the second line, than the reverse. It is never a good thing in war to criticize the measures of superior authorities—not even quietly in your own mind, because you cannot place yourself in their position. In war all orders from superior authority should be considered as decrees of fate, like rain and sunshine, day and night, and no other thought should be given them than how to execute them best, and how to understand the intentions of the superiors in the most complete manner. Criticism is apt to spoil your pleasure and keenness in your work; and, besides, is useless, because in your position it cannot be well-founded. Delight in

¹ The *jeu de mot* on the utterance which Cambronne did *not* make is more easily understood when pronounced aloud “La gar-demeure ici,” etc.—ED.

your work and keenness are indispensable. As Schiller says, "He who works not with all his might, Can ne'er in working take delight." At a later time, when history lays bare all events of the war, and gives an insight into the motives which influenced the superiors in designing their measures, their actions may be studied for self-improvement, and made the subject of independent reflection.

The General Commanding and the staff of the Guard Corps started for Nouart at 9 a.m. In Buzancy we saw the advance guard of the I. Bavarian Corps arrive to relieve ours. We then betook ourselves to the head of the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard. In the wood, called Bois de la Folie, the Corps Artillery of the IV. Corps, which marched in rear of the left division of its corps, crossed our road. It came from Bayonville and was marching on Fossé, and had therefore to be allowed to pass. This caused considerable delay, the monotony of which was agreeably broken by the appearance of a staff officer (von Verdy) coming from the Royal Headquarters. The appearance of one of these gentlemen always portended something decisive and was invariably welcomed with a hearty greeting. At last we were able to continue the march, and the head of our column reached Nouart about noon, where in pursuance of verbal orders the corps began to close up in rendezvous formation.

A distant cannonade from the north soon attracted our attention. We repaired to the height north-west of Nouart, which commands the surrounding country for miles. At the feet of this height a wooded plain (Bois de Belval, Bois de Petit Dieulet, Bois de Dieulet) extended to the north, beyond that we could recognize by the aid of our glasses the town Beaumont some seven miles away, where the ground rose towards the north. Far beyond Beaumont the horizon was limited by densely-wooded heights (Bois de Givodeau and Bois de Yoncq). We watched the battle from our vantage-point as from a box at a theatre. At Beaumont we saw the enemy's

lines of guns in action. Of our own troops, they being hidden from view by the woods, we could only judge the position by the smoke. For some time we were in doubt as to the course of the battle. The General therefore sent an aide-de-camp to the Commander-in-Chief of the Meuse Army, whom we saw halting with his staff on a lower height in front, to inquire whether the Corps should advance in support. The laconic reply was that matters were going well and that the Guard Corps might rest. To us personally the view of the battle put any rest out of the question, for we followed its course with an interest easily understood, and of our troops the regiments at the head of the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard were probably the only ones which found sufficient time to cook and eat, as it required several hours for the corps to concentrate in rendezvous formation. Meanwhile we saw how one hostile battery after the other gradually fell back. The fire of skirmishers from Beaumont, directed to the north, informed us that the town was in our hands; to the right of Beaumont a long line of guns (Saxon) threw a rain of shells on the ranks of the French, who made a few futile attempts at counter-attack. Finally we saw the French reserves (visible afar off on account of their bright red trousers) retire from the Bois de Givodeau. What surprised us was, that the reserves did not disappear in the wood, but made a flank march under our fire along the near side of the wood and then fell back between the Bois de Givodeau and Bois de Yoncq. A subsequent examination of these woods solved this puzzle. The space between the trees is filled with dense undergrowth and almost impenetrable, for which reason it has been impossible to exterminate the wolves there. These woods are an absolute obstacle to troops. They can be traversed only on the roads.

The Germans continued to advance. The village of Yoncq burst into flames. Orders were now received from Army Headquarters for the Guard Corps to follow

toward Beaumont with the Cavalry Division at the head of the column ; it was stated that the battle was won and that the pursuit was to be taken up by the cavalry. The 1st Infantry Division of the Guard was ordered to move through Grand Champy on Belle Tour followed by the corps artillery, the Cavalry Division of the Guard through Belval—Etang la Forge on Beaumont, followed by the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard. Ammunition columns and field hospitals were directed to move through Buzancy and Sommauthe on Beaumont.

The march was begun at 4 p.m. The Corps Commander with his staff marched at the head of the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard. We did not come into action however. On measuring the distance on the map as the crow flies, you will find Nouart almost 7 miles from Beaumont. The road passes through wooded valleys and is lengthened by its many bends. It is confined between marshy ditches and is really only a track. At many points on the road it was impossible for single horsemen to pass by a gun. In the depressions of the Wampe brook the road was so soft that many vehicles stuck fast in the mud and had to be hauled out with the assistance of other teams. That caused checks, and checks are terribly fatiguing, particularly for infantry. The nature of the woods, which I have described, rendered any movement on the side of the road impossible. The time consumed by the march through the defile seemed interminable to us, for we heard the sound of the guns without cessation ; it grew louder and louder as we advanced, and we could not even ride to the front to ascertain where to come into action. At Belle Tour we reached open ground at last. There we saw the first traces of the battle, and we could not understand why the enemy had allowed our troops to debouch from the defiles and deploy. The Corps Commander and his staff moved rapidly to the front as soon as it was possible to pass the advance guard, and hastened to the battle-field

north of Beaumont, where he met the Army Commander. The Cavalry Division of the Guard was already there, having covered the distance at a smart trot. (It had also been able, if I remember right, to take a better road to Beaumont than the one that had been assigned to it.) Still it arrived too late to be employed. The routed enemy had in the meantime retired from the open ground in the vicinity of Beaumont to the wooded mountains to the north, and had thence been thrown back on Mouzon by our infantry. No matter how much our cavalry had hastened its march, it was unable to fly, and the situation was materially altered between the time of receiving the order to advance and of completing a march of seven miles. The day, moreover, was drawing to a close. The Cavalry Division could not possibly arrive at Mouzon before dark. The Commander of the Army therefore ordered it to bivouac near Beaumont. The same orders were issued for the other troops of the corps. They settled down the best they could between the débris of the hostile corps, abandoned trains, captured guns, dead and wounded, and whatever other objects serve to mark a victory. The Headquarters of the Corps sought quarters in the town, where every one took shelter wherever he could find it.

The events of the Guard Corps on this day furnish additional proof of my statement so frequently made, that counter-orders invariably tire out the troops. About midnight the first orders had been issued by the Guard Corps requiring the troops to cook in time to be ready to march by 9 a.m. At 6 a.m. the second order had to be issued according to which the troops of the Guard Corps were to clear the line Sommerance—Bar—Buzancy at once and to take up a position in reserve to the east of this line. The cooking was to be done in this position. This order could not have reached the troops before

6.30 a.m., at which time the preparations for cooking must have begun (putting the meat to the fire, etc.) in order to be ready to march at 9 a.m. These preparations had to be interrupted, which naturally wasted a considerable part of the provisions. The preparations were begun anew in the new rendezvous position. At 6.30 a.m. the third order was issued directing the corps to march to Nouart; this order could not have reached the troops before 7.30 a.m. The troops had again to suspend their cooking, the head of the column put itself in motion and it is not probable that the remainder had time to cook or eat. We had hoped to reach Nouart by 10 o'clock, but the rear of the IV. Corps crossed our line of march, delaying us for two hours, and we did not reach Nouart until noon. Here the Corps was ordered to rest. I remember seeing bivouac fires with the battalions at the head of the column of the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard. They may have done their cooking. But, as already stated, the remainder could not have been equally lucky. The closing up of a corps from column of route on a single road requires many hours. At 4 p.m., however, the Corps again moved off and the march lasted until long after dark. I imagine that very few of the battalions got much to eat that day. We of the Corps Headquarters at least had nothing but a cup of coffee in the evening at Beaumont. I for my part lived on a piece of dry bread and a small piece of chocolate which I carried in my saddle-bags for an emergency, for the Headquarters provision wagons (which were probably given precedence) only reached Beaumont next morning just as we were marching off. I was thus given the opportunity to replenish my saddle-bags. The Corps had not been engaged, it is true, but yet had passed a very fatiguing day. The troops had to cover from Bar and Harricourt to Nouart 7 miles, from Nouart to Beaumont $9\frac{1}{2}$ miles (including the bends). This is not exactly an extraordinary march. But the checks and

the frequent deployments, and marchings off again, had kept them almost constantly on the move from 6 a.m. until long after dark. Had not the precaution been taken of marching off and halting by battalions and resting the remaining troops in the meantime, during the halts and marches through the forests, from Buzancy to Nouart as well as from Nouart to Beaumont, the troops would have been so exhausted as to be unable to move next day. The delays in the march were brought about by the change of *rôles* on the part of the Guard and IV. Corps, the former taking the place of the latter as reserve in rear of the centre of the Meuse Army, thus causing the crossing of columns. Here you see again how fatiguing counter-orders—however slightly they may modify the previous orders—crossing of columns and checks on the march, are for the troops. The strategist should therefore, if he can, avoid all these unfavourable influences and leave the troops in order of battle on the same spot as long as possible. We have explained that it was impossible here; and you will notice that the Guard Corps, which was on the extreme left of the Meuse Army on the 29th August, was on the extreme right 48 hours later. Even the most rational strategy cannot always avoid such evils. Napoleon I. also had to move his corps through each other in a similar manner on the 12th and 13th October, 1806.

The fact that the Cavalry Division of the Guard reached the battle-field too late for pursuit, though ordered to the front for that purpose, may provoke your criticism. It was not the fault of the cavalry, for it had halted where it had been repeatedly ordered to, by superior authority, and hastened to the front, on receiving the order, with all possible speed, covering 9 miles at a rapid pace. Whose fault was it? It was solely owing to the nature of the ground, for the cavalry was separated from

the battle-field by a densely-wooded zone, more than 5 miles in width. In debouching from the defiles of the latter the two other arms had been obliged to make their way by force, and in doing so had won the battle, for which the mass of the cavalry could not arrive in time on account of the distance it was off. For cavalry reserves, this late arrival furnishes the lesson that when a closer position is practicable, they should not be kept too far in rear of the battle-field, if their full battle value is to be realized, since it would then be impossible to utilize the short and fleeting moments favourable for their employment. They may frequently have to take up a position in reserve where accidental hits from long-range fire will reach them. This point, however, comes more under the heading of tactics than of strategy, though the first arrangements for the march of the cavalry division form part of the latter. Here, as on many other occasions, tactics and strategy overlap without any definite line of demarcation.

We left the French Army on the evening of the 29th August concentrated in a position forming an irregular quadrangle with sides not quite 9 miles in length. At the corners of the quadrangle stood the 7th Corps at St. Pierremont and Oches; the 5th Corps at Beaumont, its rear guard still on the march from Belval to Beaumont at midnight; the 12th Corps with Margueritte's Cavalry Division at Mouzon, and the 1st Corps with Bonnemain's Cavalry Division at Raucourt. Marshal MacMahon was in hopes of being able to pass his entire Army over to the right bank of the Meuse at Mouzon and Remilly on the 30th August, and to continue his march towards Montmédy. Margueritte's Cavalry Division was sent ahead from Mouzon to Carignan, to which place the Emperor also repaired. The 1st Corps was directed from Raucourt to Remilly,

there to cross the Meuse and advance to Douzy, Tetaigne and Carignan. Bonnemain's Cavalry Division was to follow this movement, and Generals Douay and De Failly had been warned of the importance of the 7th and 5th Corps crossing over to the right bank of the river at Villers and Mouzon on the same day. The Official Account does not mention any order of MacMahon to the 12th Corps. In fact it remained stationary on the right bank of the Meuse at Mouzon until noon. It was apparently intended to wait there until the three remaining corps completed crossing, with a view to covering their passage and supporting them as it had done at the battle of Beaumont.

The orders assigned to each of the three corps a separate crossing point, the 5th at Mouzon, the 7th at Villers, the 1st at Remilly. Each corps could also reach its crossing point by a separate road without crossing that of another corps. But the 7th Corps had considerably more than 9 miles (counting bends of road) from St. Pierremont and Oches to Villers. Hitherto none of the French corps had covered more than 9 miles per day. Now the corps was called upon to complete its crossing with all its columns on the same day after completing its march. The supply columns, etc., were to be sent on in advance. For the enemy was in close contact with the 7th Corps, and the march thus partook of the character of a *retreat*, though it was intended to continue the *advance* on Metz after the passage of the river. Referring to the calculation of the depth of columns in Bronsart's work on the Duties of the General Staff, you will find that a Prussian corps, with its columns, baggage, and administrative branches, has a depth of 25 miles. The 7th Corps, however, were stronger by one division than a Prussian corps, which Bronsart bases his calculations on. After the 7th Corps therefore had marched 9 miles to the crossing at Villers, a space of time must elapse—even assuming the passage to take place in perfect order—

necessary to march 25 miles before the last troops could cross. This calculation shows that the completion of the march and the passage of the river on the same day could not be counted upon, even if no enemy had existed. But the Corps knew that the enemy was following on its heels. It had been molested and delayed by them during the whole of the previous day, and there was nothing to justify the hope that they would remain inactive on the 30th August. We must conclude, therefore, that a considerable error had been made in calculating and arranging the march of the 7th Corps. The Commander-in-Chief directed that all requisitioned wagons should be left behind and sick men and horses sent to the rear; this order betrays some apprehension that the columns might become too long to cross the Meuse on the same day. When I place myself in Douay's and De Failly's position I find myself at a loss to know how to carry out these orders. How were the wagons requisitioned in the country to be got rid of? If they were simply dismissed, each peasant would try to drive home. They would be driving here, there and everywhere, blocking every road in a brief space of time. Where were the sick men and horses to be sent back to? Towards Paris, to the west? Then they were sure to fall into the enemy's hands; for on the previous day the 6th Prussian Cavalry Division had taken Voncq from the rear guard, and this engagement must have been known at Headquarters. Were these uncontrolled columns to be sent north? In that case the trains of the 5th Corps would bar the roads of the 7th and 1st Corps to the east. Were they to be sent ahead through Mouzon, Villers and Remilly? There they would have been at the heads of the columns, and it was better to have them march there under strict control, than to leave them to their own will. Were the people and sick soldiers to be left to the pursuing enemy? This could not fail to make a very questionable impression on the soldiers. It was impossible to

make all these impedimenta simply disappear from the face of the earth. The arrangements made by the staff, and which the 7th Corps subsequently complained of, seem after all to have been the most sensible. All the vehicles, including empty provision wagons, were ordered to march with the baggage, and thus the roads were cleared in the quickest possible way, notwithstanding that the wagon column of the 7th Corps acquired a length of 9 miles which the corps had to allow to pass to the front. Bronsart estimates the depth of the wagon columns of the baggage of the various offices and the supply columns of a corps, at 10 miles. If the French corps had, besides, wagons requisitioned in the country, 9 miles seem rather a short length for the supply and transport columns of the corps.

This simple calculation, however, was considerably complicated by the proximity of the enemy. The Marshal had known for several days that the Crown Prince of Saxony was marching in his direction. He had to expect that the Crown Prince would try to attack him on the 30th August, coming in touch with him on the evening of the 29th. The German squadrons bivouacked close to the French camp at St. Pierremont on the night of the 30th. The French could never hope to make a march of 9 miles to Villers and then to cross the river in a column 25 to 28 miles long, without being overtaken by the enemy, who was but 12 miles from the crossing at Villers and aware of the presence of the French corps. The unavoidable occurred. Although Douay had ordered his corps to march at 4 a.m., he was delayed until noon at Stonne, because the trains blocked the roads. Equally incorrect is the calculation—if it was ever made—that the 5th Corps could be made to cross the Meuse unmolested at Mouzon on the 30th. The division which acted as the rear guard of this corps had fought hostile troops of all three arms on the preceding day at Nouart. There was not even the prospect of having to do merely with the

enemy's advanced cavalry as might perhaps be the case with the 7th Corps. However early the 5th Corps might have marched on the 30th, it would still have been obliged to halt 5 miles away at the bridge of Mouzon, the only one at its disposal, in order to let its columns pass, and must be overtaken by the enemy, who was known to be at Nouart. Even supposing the 5th Corps had been able to begin its retreat at daybreak, the trains could not have reached the bridge at Mouzon before 7 a.m., nor cleared it before 11 or 12 o'clock. By that time the enemy could have overtaken the rear of the corps from Nouart. The battle of Beaumont might in this case have begun perhaps along the woods of Yoncq and Givodeau.

The most impartial criticism, putting aside any intention of finding faults, cannot but censure the French commander for failing to calculate, whether the orders issued could possibly be executed. Might MacMahon perhaps have had in his mind the dictum of Napoleon the First, who is credited with the saying that impossibilities should invariably be demanded of the troops in order that they may do their utmost?

Not every sentence that falls from the lips of a great man is oracular, and least of all this one. For if a soldier is taxed beyond what he is capable of, there is no option but to acquiesce in his falling short of the demand, provided he has done what was within human power. By such sayings he is taught indiscipline. The application of such a principle to strategy is a very serious matter. If a commander demands an impossibility he can never judge how much will be accomplished, and he deprives himself of all ground on which to base further combinations. This might produce the most dangerous situations. If, for instance, troops advancing on several parallel roads were ordered to perform marches of such length that they cannot be carried out, not one of the columns would reach its destination, each would fall more or less short of it. The troops farthest in advance would be in danger on

account of their isolated position. This dictum of Napoleon belongs, in my opinion, to those paradoxes with which great men sometimes amuse themselves. True strategy demands that we should first weigh well and then risk. A strategist must first consider how much the troops *can* do, and regulate accordingly his orders and the risk he runs. In the war of 1870-71 it happened very rarely in the German Army that a body of troops did not reach its destination, and then only when obstacles were encountered which were not known beforehand, as for instance that impracticable mountain track, which the II. Bavarian Corps encountered on the 29th August from Vienne to St. Juvin. In all other cases the principle, "What has been ordered must be carried out," was strictly adhered to in this war. The reply, "It is impossible," was unknown. The commanders were thereby able to depend on the troops reaching their destinations in the evening, and to base their further combinations on this. But this was only possible by the general principle being kept of never asking more of the troops than they could accomplish.

It seems possible to me, however, that there may have been other circumstances which induced Marshal MacMahon to issue orders, so imperfectly or erroneously calculated, for the 7th and 5th Corps. The position of the French Army on the evening of the 29th August was most unfavourable. Whether it continued its advance to the east on the morning of the 30th, or resumed its retreat to the west, it was bound to be overtaken by superior hostile forces, as I have explained above. Even its retreat westward over the roads by which it had advanced was now cut off. Voncq had been taken by the enemy after some fighting in the course of the day. The retreat to the north would lead to the Belgian frontier and could not terminate favourably. On the other hand it was too late to take the offensive to the south, for MacMahon must have known that the Crown Prince of Prussia was now

in position to come up in line with the Saxons. MacMahon could certainly have calculated this much. Though he was in no way responsible for the situation in which the army had been placed by the lack of judgment and fear of revolution of the Ministry, he may have decided to carry out the orders of the Paris Government as best he could, and may have issued the disposition for the passage of the Meuse hoping inwardly for some lucky accident, perhaps a remissness on the part of the enemy, or, in the worst case, waiting to see what troops the generals commanding the army corps might be able to bring safely to the right bank of the river. In my opinion he realized that the two corps (7th and 5th) could not cross the latter on the 30th August without suffering defeat, if the enemy pursued.

You may think that matters had not come to such a desperate pass with the French Army on the night of the 29th August. Very well. Place yourself in MacMahon's position and imagine what orders you would have given, now that you know the exact position of the German armies. Since Stenay remained in the hands of the enemy for good, the march to liberate Bazaine could only be continued *viâ* Carignan and Montmédy. The 5th French Corps at Beaumont, for instance, was 24 miles from that point *viâ* Mouzon, the opposing German XII. Corps from Stenay only 9 miles. The 7th Corps was 38 miles away *viâ* Villers, the opposing Guard Corps from Stenay only 19 miles. The passage of the Meuse could lead to nothing but destruction, leaving out of consideration the fact that it could not be accomplished unmolested on the 30th August. The march westward was already blocked at Attigny and Vioncq, as previously stated. The enemy was in position to overtake the army on its retreat to Sedan and Mézières with the same ease as had before stopped the passage of the Meuse at Mouzon and Remilly. Moreover, the retreat on Mézières had once before been prohibited by the Government. It could not therefore

be considered until battle had demonstrated the impossibility of penetrating farther to the east.

I think that under any circumstances a battle was unavoidable on the 30th August, and that it would therefore have been advisable for the French Army to assemble all its forces in order to fight it under circumstances as favourable as possible. On the 30th August there was no longer any opportunity of taking up the offensive towards the south which had promised at least a fleeting success against the German Guard and XII. Corps on the 29th; but all the forces might have been concentrated in a defensive position on the line Stonne—La Besace—Yoncq—Bois de Givodeau. The right might have been rested on the Bois du Mon Dieu, the roads traversing which could have been held by a small force, the left on the Meuse. I cannot say that I believe this position would have been inexpugnable. The united Third and Meuse Armies would have forced it in the end. As things were actually arranged—since the Germans also brought up the XI. Corps and the Wurttemberg Division to Briulles—the German main forces would have been launched against the front of this position, with the I. Bavarian Corps in readiness at Raucourt behind the right, and the XII. Corps at Mouzon behind the left wing in support. It is not impossible that a battle of two days might have been necessary to take this position, during which the French corps might have sent their baggage in advance in the direction of Mézières on several roads (one north and two south of the Meuse). In case they were forced from their positions, they could have followed their trains on the same roads without being impeded by them. The Ministry would then have permitted a retreat because its necessity would have been demonstrated by a lost battle. That is my opinion now, after looking impartially at everything that was done or contemplated at the time.

For this very reason I call MacMahon's position on the night of the 29th August a desperate one. There is no

more desperate position for a general than that of being forced against his better judgment by the obstinacy and ignorance of his Government into a position the best way out of which appears to lie in proving by a lost battle the necessity of a retreat, otherwise prohibited by it. During this night MacMahon could not possibly have reckoned on a successful issue for the impending battle. Thus his defeat was already a certainty on the night of the 29th August. The fact that this defeat was increased to a catastrophe is due to the events of the 30th August.

In the first place one division of the 5th Corps allowed itself to be surprised soon after noon by the IV. Prussian Corps. The shells of the latter fell into the camp while the men were engaged in drawing rations. The nature of the two roads by which the IV. Corps approached renders this quite astonishing. I described them to you before, and stated how easily the defiles of these narrow forest roads—which do not allow of any movement along their sides—might have been barred by small forces. If only one battalion with a couple of guns had been placed in front of each outlet, the IV. Corps would have been unable to deploy its forces until the XII. Corps on the right and the I. Bavarian Corps on the left had threatened the flanks of the French 5th Corps. In the meantime, till nearly 2 o'clock, the latter would have had ample time to take up and ensconce itself in a defensive position. Failly relied on the reports of a few patrols who had seen nothing of the enemy. .

In order to fully understand the matter, we have to ask two questions, neither of which can be answered from the material at present available. Had no rear guard been left behind at the proper distance to throw out outposts? or did the rear guard or the outposts fail to do their duty? The Official Account states that on the evening of the 29th Failly had left a rear guard of two brigades at Belval and Champy (Maussion and Nicolas), and that this rear guard, which had marched off at 9 p.m. to follow its corps,

arrived at Beaumont between 4 and 5 p.m. Unless further orders were received it was their duty to continue to act as a rear guard and to post outposts. Even then, however, the two brigades, though guilty of remissness, should be judged with considerable leniency. The troops of the corps, as we know, had not rested on the 28th August until late at night, some of them not until towards morning; they had started again at 10 a.m. Both these brigades had marched or fought all day, had remained behind as rear guard and then made a night march on a difficult road. They must have arrived at the end of their strength, and in this condition of complete exhaustion remissness on outpost duty is human, although it is always a military fault. With proper care on the part of the commander of the 5th Corps this rear guard would have been relieved by other troops, who had meanwhile been supplied with provisions. I revert to what I stated before: If an impossibility be demanded of the troops there is danger that nothing will be done.

Moreover, the two brigades which formed the rear guard do not seem to have formed one command with definite orders, since they belonged to two different divisions (1st and 2nd). The positions of Belval and Champy are so close together that without a commander common to both no proper action could be reckoned on. Although the two brigades became completely separated on their night march through the narrow defiles of the forest, still their combined action, and therefore a single commander, became a necessity as soon as they reached the outlets of the defiles, which lie close together, and debouched into the open ground to the south of Beaumont. One is almost inclined to suspect, that no order to form a rear guard was issued from the corps headquarters and that the latter contented itself with ordering the divisions to march to Beaumont, each of them leaving its rear brigade on the narrow road in the woods as a rear guard, directing it

to join the bivouac towards morning. If this be the case, reflection and criticism on such apathy on the part of leaders and troops would be useless.

Failly states that he thought the enemy, whom he had fought on the 29th August, to be on the march to Stenay. I am not aware, however, what made him believe this, since the Saxon Corps with which he came in contact at Nouart, was coming from Dun.

An exhausted and starving army corps surprised by a shower of shells will think more of resuming its march than of battle. It is impossible to praise too highly the bravery with which the troops of the 5th French Corps fought in the battle of Beaumont and even checked the advance of the first Prussian troops here and there by offensive counter-strokes, and by the rapidity with which they formed up.

On hearing the cannonade of the 5th Corps, each of the three remaining French Corps acted in a different manner.

The 12th Corps, which had passed over to the right bank of the Meuse at Mouzon on the previous evening, sent an infantry and a cavalry brigade back over the river to directly support the 5th Corps, and deployed the 2nd Division and the Artillery Reserve in an effective firing line on the right bank of the Meuse against the right flank of the German troops. General Lebrun had taken these measures on his own initiative; he may have observed the embarrassing situation of the 5th Corps from the heights on the right bank of the river. But the Marshal does not seem to have approved of the action of the 12th Corps, on his arrival at 2 p.m., for he prevented General Lebrun from sending the other brigade of Grandchamp's Division also through Mouzon across the Meuse, and ordered a cuirassier regiment of the cavalry brigade to be brought back.

The passage of the Meuse at Remilly by the 1st Corps was delayed by the damming of the river. The sound of

the guns from Beaumont being plainly heard, General Ducrot sent to inquire if assistance were needed. On receiving a positive reply from the Marshal that all was well and that the corps was to continue its march, the latter then resumed its advance and remained away from the field of battle.

We have already stated that the 7th Corps started at 4 a.m., but was delayed at Stonne by its baggage. It was 10 a.m. before the brigade of the rear guard could leave St. Pierremont. The I. Bavarian Corps was therefore close upon it, as was also the Prussian V. Corps. It was 1 p.m. before the 7th French Corps could resume their march to Besace. Soon afterwards General Douay heard the sound of the guns from Beaumont. Conscientiously obeying the positive order to cross the Meuse on this day, and convinced that he would be unable to do so by the road to Villers, he turned off to Remilly and avoided the country whence the firing was heard. Conseil Dumesnil's Division, which marched at the head, had meanwhile encountered the troops of the I. Bavarian Corps and was driven back after offering a determined resistance. The remaining troops of the 7th Corps likewise failed to reach the passage at Remilly without an action. Dumont's Division was overtaken by the Bavarians at Raucourt, and driven out of the place, and Liebert's Division had to halt on the heights of Angécourt to cover the retreat of these troops. Lastly the bridge of Remilly broke down towards evening, and General Douay with the rest of his corps had to cross the Meuse at Sedan by a night march.

If we mean to criticize the action of these three corps solely for our own instruction we must, in my opinion, concede that the 12th and 1st Corps acted correctly. The 12th Corps saw the embarrassment of the 5th Corps and helped as best it could until the Commander-in-Chief gave counter-orders. The 1st Corps was too far away to judge of the importance of the cannonade. It halted and

made inquiry just as the Prussian Guard Corps did the day before at Buzancy on hearing the engagement at Nouart. It received the same answer as the latter and, like it, resumed its march by order. But the 7th Corps paying no heed to the neighbouring corps, made a detour in order to reach a crossing other than the one assigned, simply because it believed that the order to cross the Meuse on that day must be rigidly adhered to. It is necessary in the first place to understand, that the object of having two corps marching on parallel roads so close together, can be no other than to enable them to mutually support each other when in danger. The 7th Corps also should have considered, that the wishes of the Commander-in-Chief would be but poorly served, if the 5th Corps reached him on the other bank of the Meuse in a shattered state. It should therefore have lent its assistance to get it across in an efficient condition. Lastly, the 7th Corps might have calculated that, if the whole 1st Corps and Bonnemain's Cavalry Division had been directed to cross at Remilly, one day would not suffice for another corps to cross the river at that point. The Corps was therefore bound to be overtaken by the enemy whose guns were heard at Beaumont, as well as by the one pursuing it. A passable result might have been expected from an engagement, if it combined its forces with the 5th Corps for common action rather than if it suffered its various divisions to be overtaken and driven back by the enemy. It might also have considered, that the passage of the Meuse could not be the only object, and that the Marshal would want to employ the Corps on the following day. But if it were to march all day on the 30th August and throughout the following night, it could not be effective on the 31st August. The breaking down of the bridge at Remilly must be regarded as an unforeseen accident. The detour through Sedan increased the fatigue, and so on the morning of the 31st August the Corps was in position north of Sedan, partly defeated, starving, exhausted,

and in a condition in which nothing else could be done but rest.

The Official Account mentions another matter of detail to which I must invite your attention. The baggage column, 9½ miles long, which delayed the 7th Corps, was escorted by seven battalions of infantry marching on both sides of the road. I cannot understand how the combatant force was allowed to be weakened by a whole brigade of infantry in order to guard the baggage. At the beginning of the war of 1870 I was asked by the Chief of the Staff of my Corps what escort I wanted for the ammunition columns. I told him not one man, for if the strategical situation failed to protect the columns from the enemy's regular forces, an infantry brigade would not suffice, and that there were enough men with the columns to protect them against mischief from any ill-disposed hostile individuals; and that I merely asked him so to direct the columns that they would be covered by their corps. This was carried out. I cannot understand, therefore, that an escort of seven battalions should have been attached to the baggage columns 9 miles in length, which were sent to precede the 7th Corps in the retirement over the Meuse.

The measures which Marshal MacMahon took during the battle of Beaumont, bear on their face the stamp of the desperate situation in which he was placed. He had become aware by this time, that not the Emperor, but the Regency at Paris was his real superior. This authority had given him peremptory orders to continue the march eastward, although he (MacMahon) had recognized two days before that this operation was ruinous, and had expressed his conviction to that effect. He meant to obey at any cost. For this reason he enjoined the 7th and 5th Corps to cross the Meuse on this day by any means, and thus prompted the 7th Corps to leave the 5th in the lurch. For this reason he replied to the 1st Corps, that all was well and that it should continue the march to Carignan. For

this reason he ordered the 12th Corps to withdraw the troops which it had sent across the Meuse to the support of the 5th Corps. For this reason he inclined to the opinion at 2.30 p.m. that it was more important to withdraw the troops gradually from the left bank than to accumulate more forces there.

Soon afterward, on the same afternoon, he decided on and ordered a general retreat to Sedan, thus apparently relinquishing the march eastward. (According to Wimpffen's work this order reached the troops assembled at Mairy at 9 p.m.) Whence this sudden change of plan? you will ask. It was less a change of plan than the result of his no longer being master of his army. The whole 5th Corps, two divisions of the 7th Corps, and one brigade of the 12th Corps, had been defeated. The fugitives were pouring into Sedan, attracted by the pernicious magnetic attraction exercised by the proximity of a fortress, which had already bound Bazaine to Metz, and caused his destruction.¹

Nearly the whole remainder of the 7th Corps was separated from the Marshal by the Meuse, and was compelled to march through Sedan by the left bank of the river. The only troops of which the Marshal could dispose at all were the bulk of the 12th Corps (1 infantry brigade, 1 cavalry regiment, and 3 batteries being absent), the 1st Corps and the two cavalry divisions. Nothing remained but to move the available portions of the army to that point where the stream of fugitives had directed itself, in order to collect and re-form the troops under their protection; for he could not think of continuing the hazardous operation eastward with less than one half of his forces.

¹ This power of attraction has a queer effect on men. Later on I was quartered in the house of a quiet old gentleman in the vicinity of a small fortress. He told me he had sent his entire family into the fortress, and asked if they were secure there. He grew pale when I told him that they would be safer in the midst of our hostile army than in the fortress. The latter was soon afterwards completely destroyed by our fire.

The appearance of General von Wimpffen was not calculated to increase the Marshal's confidence in his own power and authority. Though he may have had no idea of the secret order which conferred the command on Wimpffen in case something should happen to Marshal MacMahon, still it remained a gross violation of his authority for the War Minister to take from him one corps commander and assign him another, while the Emperor was with him, who alone had the right to appoint generals to command. The ground was shaking beneath him. It must have required much self-negation and patriotism on the part of MacMahon not to have Wimpffen arrested and rendered harmless, or else to resign the command at the most critical moment. We who are accustomed to acknowledge no higher authority than that of the monarch, our supreme commander, are altogether unable to place ourselves in MacMahon's position; hence we lack any standard by which to criticize this action.

The defeated French army corps assembled during the night and in the course of the 31st August to the north of Sedan. The 1st Corps and the two cavalry divisions occupied on the 31st August the line of the Chiers for the protection of those retreating there, and then marched likewise to the country north of Sedan. The 12th Corps took position on the heights north of Bazeilles, near La Moncelle and Balan.

THIRTY-FIRST LETTER.

THE 31ST AUGUST.

No special reports had reached the German Supreme Command from either army by 11 p.m. on the 30th August, the time when orders were issued ; not even the position of the various corps had been reported. The Supreme Command had been present at the battle until it had been decided, and knew from this and from the reports received before noon, that a success had been gained, and that the enemy was retiring in a northerly direction. Though no idea could as yet be formed of the extent and full importance of the victory, still there was the consciousness of having been strengthened by it and of having prevented a considerable portion of the hostile army from continuing its march eastward. It was certain that by a continuation of the offensive in a northerly direction, the remainder of the enemy would be held fast and prevented from moving east.

But since the victory had increased our strength, we had a surplus of troops at our disposal which could be employed to threaten the enemy's flank. On the 30th August the sole object of the German commanders had been to concentrate as many troops as possible on a front facing north to ensure being superior to the opposing portion of the enemy, and to force him to retreat towards the Belgian frontier, which would greatly embarrass him. With the exception of the cavalry thrown out to observe and harass his flanks, no forces had been employed on the 30th August for a turning movement. The XI. Army Corps, with the Wurttemberg Division, which had

originally been directed on Le Chesne, had been brought up against the enemy's right wing as soon as his resistance became serious. Greater things could now be aimed at for the 31st August. After the victory troops could be spared to envelop the enemy and destroy him completely.

The caution with which the German Supreme Command acted here is exceedingly instructive. In turning the enemy's flank, you invariably lay your own flank open. A turning movement is therefore advantageous only to the victor, whilst it increases the disadvantages of the defeated. In this case both sides had turned their opponent's right flank. Whoever was victorious in this engagement would threaten the enemy's lines of communication and retreat. At the first engagement on the 30th August, therefore, everything depended on being as strong as possible in the frontal attack. Everything else had to be disregarded, for only after superiority had been gained could flanking and enveloping movements be considered.

Military history furnishes many instances of dispositions with ingenious and artfully prepared strategical operations which aim at great successes by means of extensive turning movements and pressure on the enemy's flanks and communications before coming into contact with him. These can only succeed against a sluggish enemy. If the opponent, being weaker, retires, the turning movement will at least have caused loss of time. If an enemy equally strong advances with his forces united, he will rend the net which was to be spun round him and shatter this artificial strategy. Even the first Napoleon employed turning movements and detachments against the flanks only when he was certain of his superiority (Ulm, Wagram, Bautzen). He won the majority of his battles because he knew how to concentrate superior forces for a frontal blow at the decisive point. Afterwards he acted against the flanks and line of retreat. The German Supreme Command acted in the same manner in 1870. The first

engagements were essentially frontal (Weissenburg, Woerth, Spicheren), in which an outflanking and finally enveloping attack became possible only by the deployment of a stronger, and, therefore, longer front. It was only when the enemy had been forced to retreat, and the superiority of the German armies had been established, that flanking and turning movements came into consideration, culminating in the battles round Metz. The same may be said of the 30th and 31st August. When superiority of numbers rendered flanking movements possible, they were not made by skilful manœuvres during the battle, but by measures taken during the approach to the battle-field which resulted in turning the enemy's position. I wish to caution you against all elaborate movements made during the battle with a view to turning the enemy, and I recommend you to effect the turning either by overlapping the enemy and wheeling that wing inwards, or by directing the masses accordingly, during their approach to the battle-field.

The orders issued from the Royal Headquarters at 11 p.m. on the 30th August already aim at the great success of Sedan by enveloping both hostile flanks, and may therefore be called the dispositions for the battle of Sedan. It is all the more interesting because they were issued, as stated, without accurate knowledge of the positions of our own troops, and must thus leave even more freedom to the subordinate leaders than the former dispositions did. Permit me, therefore, to quote it verbatim from the Official Account (Appendix 42) and save you the trouble of looking it up.

“ Buzancy, the 30th August, 11 p.m.

“ Army Order.

“ Although the points at which the engagements of each corps terminated have not yet been reported, it is certain that the enemy has fallen back or been defeated everywhere.

"The advance is therefore to be continued early in the morning and the enemy is to be energetically attacked wherever he may make a stand on this side of the Meuse ; every effort is to be made to force him into the narrowest possible space between the river and the Belgian frontier.

"The troops under the orders of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Saxony¹ are specially charged to prevent the enemy's left wing from escaping to the east. It is recommended to send forward two corps, if possible, on the right bank of the Meuse and take the enemy's position at Mouzon in flank and in rear.

"The Third Army will in a similar manner act against the enemy's front and right flank. The strongest possible artillery positions should be taken up on the near bank so as to harass the hostile columns on their march and in their camps in the plain on the right bank from Mouzon downward.

"Should the enemy cross the Belgian frontier without being disarmed at once, he is to be followed without delay.

"His Majesty the King will proceed from here to Sommauthe at 8.30 a.m.

"The instructions issued by the army commanders are to be sent here until that hour.

"(Sd.) V. MOLTKE."

This army order should be called a "direction" rather than a plan of operations, or definite instruction. The Supreme Command could not lay down more than general "directions," since the proper basis for all dispositions was wanting, viz. information as to the position of our own troops and the enemy. It was high time to give the army commanders some suggestions for harmonious action if they were to receive them in time to issue definite instructions for the 31st August. The Supreme

¹ The Meuse Army.

Command mentioned two objects as being most desirable for this date: first, to pursue the enemy to the Meuse, and secondly, to turn both his flanks, two army corps being thought sufficient against the enemy's left flank, whilst as regards the other flank, the term "in a similar manner" was used. If the Supreme Command assumed that $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 army corps were necessary here, it must have considered 3 to $3\frac{1}{2}$ army corps (exclusive of the cavalry divisions and also of the VI. Corps which could not reach the Army on the 31st August) sufficient for a front line to pursue the defeated enemy to the Meuse on the 31st August, whom they believed to be concentrating on the right bank between Mouzon and Sedan, and further to destroy those of his troops which might still be on the left bank. These instructions were sufficient for the two army commanders, who had given so many proofs of their spontaneous co-operation; on receipt of the general idea they could make harmonious dispositions even if the enemy's situation differed from the one assumed at the Royal Headquarters, and therefore called for different arrangements.

Pursuant to this army order the Third Army issued instructions at 3 a.m. requiring the XI. Corps to march to Donch ry followed by the V. Corps.

The I. Bavarian Corps, followed by the II. Bavarian Corps, was ordered to Remilly. The 4th Cavalry Division started at daybreak in advance of the army corps to pursue the enemy. The Wurttemberg Division was thrown out in the direction of Mezi res, because Vinoy's Corps was reported to be assembling there. This Division was to march through La Neuville and Vendresse to Boutaucourt and take up a position there.

The 6th Cavalry Division was also sent forward in the direction of Mezi res by way of Bouvellemont to reconnoitre, while the 5th was ordered to halt and observe towards Reims, where large bodies of the enemy had been reported.

The VI. Corps was ordered to move to Attigny, Semuy, and vicinity, so as to be ready to oppose an enemy coming from Reims when reported by the 5th Cavalry Division. The 2nd Cavalry Division was to follow the V. Corps.

Here you can see the various methods of employing the cavalry divisions: the 4th Cavalry Division was to pursue, the 5th and 6th were to reconnoitre the enemy assembling at Reims and Mezières, and the 2nd being kept in reserve for the battle.

You may perhaps find fault with this disposition of the Third Army because too many troops were employed in covering the flank towards Reims and Mezières (1½ corps and 2 cavalry divisions). I believe that the army commander would have considered a smaller force sufficient, if any one had been able to tell the strength of the enemy at Reims and Mezières. However, that could not be known, and no one could estimate how many reinforcements and new formations were approaching from the interior of France. The Army therefore prepared for at least an army corps in each of these towns, which must be held in check until a decisive battle had been fought with MacMahon's Army.

In the case of the Meuse Army it is interesting to note that the instructions from the Supreme Command had again been anticipated, before they were received, and the measures taken corresponded exactly with the intentions of the latter. The Commander had decided on the evening of the 30th to cross the Meuse early on the morning of the 31st August with two corps and two cavalry divisions, and had given orders to the Guard Corps to throw a bridge over the Meuse at Létanne during the night. The Army Commander intended the IV. Corps also to cross the Meuse at Mouzon.

In accordance with the orders of 11 p.m. of the 30th August from the Royal Headquarters, the Meuse Army issued its dispositions at 6 a.m. on the 31st, which I will also quote verbatim from the Official Account (Appendix

42, Vol. 2, Part I.) because I intend to add the orders of the Guard Corps so that, if it does not weary you, you may follow the action of the strategical machinery:—

“ Headquarters, Beaumont,

“ 31st August, 1870.

“ 6 a.m.

“ The army will continue to-day its advance on Sedan on both banks of the Meuse.¹

“ The Cavalry Division of the Guard Corps will cross the Meuse at Pouilly at 8 a.m. and march on Carignan *viâ* Autréville, Malandry and Sailly. At 9 a.m. the Infantry Divisions of the Guard Corps will follow, marching if possible in two columns, the First from Pouilly along the banks of the Meuse, passing by the south of Autréville, through the Bois d'Inor to Malandry and Sailly, in advance on the right, the Second through Autréville between the Bois de Moulin and the Bois de Blanchampagne to Vaux.

“ The Cavalry Division of the XII. Corps will cross the Meuse at Létanne at 8 a.m. and march down stream through Moulins on the ridge, keeping in line and communicating with the Cavalry Division of the Guard. The leading troops of the Saxon infantry will cross the Meuse at Létanne at 10 a.m. and march *viâ* Ferme St. Remy and Moulins to the ridge mentioned, and advance on Douzy along the same, or, if the cavalry reports the enemy in retreat, along the valley of the Meuse on Douzy.

“ The IV. Corps will be in rendezvous formation to the west of Mouzon by 11 a.m., and will wait for orders.

“ I shall march with the XII. Corps.

“ Should the enemy cross the Belgian frontier without being disarmed at once, he is to be followed without

¹ For some time after its constitution the Meuse Army was spoken of as an *Armée-Abtheilung*, i.e. literally, Army Detachment. It is so called in the orders in question.—ED.

delay, otherwise crossing the Belgian frontier is strictly prohibited.

“(Sd.) ALBERT, CROWN PRINCE OF SAXONY.”

You will perceive from these orders that, to conform to the orders of the Royal Headquarters, the Meuse Army had only to modify its dispositions of the evening of the 30th August by leaving the IV. Corps for the present in a rendezvous position at Mouzon on the left bank of the Meuse instead of allowing all three corps to cross over to the right bank. The ideas, however, on which the orders were based at 6 a.m. differ materially from those on which the Supreme Command had based its orders on the preceding evening. The latter were based on the supposition that the enemy would take up a position on the right bank of the Meuse to hold the river from Mouzon downwards. But the Meuse Army had been informed during the night by patrols that the enemy was in full retreat to the north-west, and making full use of the rail between Carignan and Sedan, and that, therefore, no serious resistance need be anticipated on the right bank of the Meuse or on this side of the Chiers. For this reason the Army immediately opened out by diverging marches, from its concentrated position near Beaumont, so that the Guard Corps also was in position to cross the Chiers on this day, and to extend its turning movement to the Belgian frontier so as to close every line of communication to the east towards Bazaine.

It is very interesting to note how the Meuse Army endeavoured at once to march in several columns from the dense formation caused by concentrating for the battle of Beaumont. All the existing permanent passages of the Meuse were made use of and new ones were constructed. After crossing the river each corps, and if at all possible each division, was allotted a separate road. Only in rear of the cavalry divisions did infantry divisions march on the same roads. But if you calculate the

depths of columns and consider the hours of starting, you will find that the former had cleared the roads long before the latter took them.

In comparing the orders issued by the Third and Meuse Armies you will perhaps note, if you examine the two styles, that the former begins by informing the troops that the objective is the pursuit of the defeated enemy, while the beginning of the disposition of the Meuse Army does not mention this. If you wish to criticize this omission by the latter, I shall take up the cudgels on behalf of its staff. The whole Army had seen that the enemy was defeated and had to be pursued. It was not necessary to inform it of this fact. But there were several units in the Third Army who had not seen the enemy on the 30th August, though they had heard the sound of guns, and these had to be informed that a victory had been gained. For to pursue a beaten enemy is quite a different matter to advancing on an intact one.

Lastly, you will perhaps note that in its orders issued at 6 a.m. the Meuse Army directs that the cavalry divisions should be on the move by 8 a.m.; this could easily be done, since all the staffs were at Beaumont, but the army corps had to dispatch these orders immediately to the cavalry before the usual time of issuing orders.¹

In issuing its orders at 7 a.m. the Guard Corps had in this instance simply to quote verbatim the portions referring to the Corps, and to add that the 1st Infantry Division was to form the right, the 2nd Division the left column; that the Corps Artillery was to follow the 2nd Infantry Division; that the troops were to take with them from their bivouacs only what was absolutely necessary for battle, that all other baggage and ammunition columns and field hospitals were to wait for orders at the bivouacs of each corps.

¹ It must be remembered that in the Meuse Army the Guard and XII. Corps had each a cavalry division besides the two attached to the army.—ED.

The orders for the two other corps were then added in the same form in which they had been received from Army Headquarters in order to inform the Corps about the neighbouring troops.

The Corps Commander and staff started at 8 a.m. to witness the passage of the river. The bridges over the Meuse had been ready for use from 6 a.m. The passage of the Cavalry of the Guard was delayed, I do not remember by what, so that the 1st Infantry Division could not begin to cross over the bridge until 9.30 a.m. the Corps Headquarters marched at head of it. Notwithstanding the military importance of the day, the beauty of the country through which we were passing made a lasting impression on me, so beautiful were the valley and the northern banks of the Meuse. From Pouilly we took a good track across some meadows, then followed the high road up stream to Inor, whence we turned to the left up the hillside to the forest of Malandry. The high road became more and more narrow in the beautiful open forest until it became a lumber road, and finally ended in a footpath. This circumstance caused no delay because there was no underwood at all, so even the wagons found sufficient space to pass between the trees. After traversing the forest and coming to the open fields on the plateau, we could ride closer and more comfortably than on the roads.

About this time a report was received from the Cavalry Division that all the bridges over the Chiers assigned to the Guard Corps (Carignan and Blagny) had been destroyed by the enemy. The Division had found the enemy at Carignan, and fired some shells at him. The Corps Commander had now to decide whether to force the passages of the Chiers at Carignan and Blagny, or to cross the river higher up. The latter conformed more to the orders received by the corps, since it was to intercept the enemy's road to the east, and to reach the Belgian frontier with its right flank. Orders were therefore issued from the heights of Malandry at 1.15 p.m.: to reconnoitre at

once the passages of the Chiers at Linay and La Ferté as well as at Fromy, with a view of making bridges there ; the 1st Infantry Division was to march from Malandry to Villy ; the 2nd Infantry Division not to march to Vaux, but to draw nearer the 1st Division, moving from Blanchampagne, because it was intended to envelop the enemy on the right bank of the Chiers.

The hussars of the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard reported that the bridge at Fromy had been destroyed, and that the one at Linay was passable. At 3.20 p.m. the 1st Infantry Division began to cross the Chiers at that point by a bridge which the enemy had failed to destroy completely. A report was received here from the Cavalry Division of the Guard, that the bridge at Carignan was intact, and that the enemy had retired to Sedan. A few lucky shots of the horse artillery had set fire to a truck of a provision train, which in consequence was unable to depart for Carignan, and fell into our hands as a welcome booty. The leading squadron of the Cavalry of the Guard, under Captain Goddaeus, crossed the bridge and penetrated into the town, capturing a number of prisoners, notwithstanding the hostile fire from the houses. I have never been able to ascertain whence the first erroneous report originated that the bridge at Carignan had been destroyed ; this mistake cost the two Infantry Divisions long detours and undue fatigue. The 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard, if Blanchampagne had been reached as ordered, had a much shorter road to the enemy by way of Carignan than the 1st Division ; the general commanding had therefore directed that the 2nd Division was to cross at Carignan, and to form the first line to pursue the enemy, and that the 1st Division was to follow on as a second line. An additional report was received which rendered a further modification of the disposition necessary (fortunately before it had been sent off). For the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard had been greatly delayed on the narrow roads by the counter-

orders in the woods between Autréville and Blanchampagne, and lost its way, so that it was unable to reach the latter place before 7 p.m. (a further instance of the injurious consequences of counter-orders). The Guard Corps received at the same time the order from the Commander of the Meuse Army to envelop the enemy from the east on the right bank of the Chiers, to establish its headquarters at Sachy, and to post outposts on the line Pouru St. Remy—Pouru aux Bois.

Orders were therefore issued at 3.45 p.m. directing the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard to send a strong advance guard to occupy the line Pouru St. Remy—Pouru aux Bois, to establish communications with the XII. Corps on their left flank south of Francheval, while the main body and staff were to take up cantonments at Escombres. The 2nd Infantry Division was assigned cantonments at Messincourt (staff), Pure, Osne, Sachy, the Corps Artillery at Carignan, the Cavalry Division of the Guard at Carignan (the headquarters), Clemency and Matton.

The provision wagons and divisional baggage were ordered to Carignan, the ammunition columns and field hospitals to the same place, but on the left bank of the Chiers.

It is interesting to observe here how, as soon as the advanced points of the infantry came in contact with the enemy, the cavalry divisions finished their reconnoitring duties, and were placed as a fighting reserve in rear of the infantry.

We continued our march after the orders were issued. Before reaching Carignan we saw on both sides of the road traces of extensive camps which had been lately abandoned. The inhabitants stated that the French 1st Corps had bivouacked there (as a fact only two of its divisions and Margueritte's Cavalry Division), and that the last troops had departed a few hours ago. They showed us the house in which the Emperor had passed the preceding night (which was a mistake, for the Emperor had pro-

ceeded to Sedan by rail at 11 p.m.). The train with provisions captured at Carignan contained so many supplies of all kinds, that the Guard Corps lived on them for eight days. The Commissariat at once took possession of this valuable spoil, and the troops had only to send their requisitions to it.

After some delay at Carignan the Corps Commander and his staff resumed their march, in order to establish their headquarters in the prescribed place, before dark, at Sachy, as ordered. We were all very hungry and tired, as well as our horses. In this condition the animals take very long strides. The one ridden by the general commanding on that day always did so. Now it moved with a speed which equalled the short trot of other horses. Thus we reached the vicinity of Sachy with unexpected rapidity. There I happened to notice that on our right some hussars of the Guard (divisional cavalry of the 1st Infantry Division) were carefully searching the places and throwing out scouts, and that three hussars followed on the road behind us. I expressed my suspicion to the general that we were in front of the most advanced troops of our Corps. He was unwilling to believe me, but sent an officer and five men ahead to Sachy to assign the various quarters. We soon heard some shots from the village, and Lieut. von Watzdorff, whose horse had been wounded, brought back five prisoners, a small sample of the enemy's Army (1 trooper, 1 gunner, and 3 infantry soldiers, whom he had taken prisoners in the village street), as a proof that he could not make arrangements for quarters. The 1st Infantry Division of the Guard was so tired on reaching Carignan, that it was compelled to halt there for two hours. The Corps Headquarters had not remained there so long, and failing to see the troops resting on one side of the town, had erroneously supposed that the advance guard of the Corps had gone on ahead. Thus for a short time we formed the extreme point of the Corps, and very

nearly rode unsuspectingly into the midst of the enemy. Sachy had to be taken from him, and since it is difficult to despatch routine business punctually in a place which must first be taken from the enemy, the General Commanding decided to establish his headquarters at Carignan. The 1st Infantry Division experienced no further difficulties, for though the villages were full of hostile troops, being stragglers they either surrendered or fled.

The Guard Corps had thus reached the extreme right of the Meuse Army on the 31st August by a forced march, and moved from the reserve into the first line.

The remaining portions of the German Armies also reached their intended destinations.

The Cavalry Division of the XII. Corps had advanced on the left of that of the Guard Corps. The leading squadron had captured a number of stragglers and baggage on the road from Mouzon to Douzy at an early hour, and had observed the enemy's retreat to Sedan. The cavalry then extended over the entire space between the Meuse and the Chiers, observed the hostile masses on the northern bank of the Chiers marching from Carignan to Sedan, and occupied the bridges of Brevilly and Douzy. After Captain von Klenk with his squadron of Guard Reiters had seized the first-named bridge, the regimental commander crossed over with a troop about noon, and passed through Pouru St. Remy, which was filled with French infantry. He returned with little loss to the bridge by passing around the village. The hostile infantry was driven from Douzy by artillery fire, and beyond that place a convoy was surprised and prevented from pursuing its march by having its teams carried off, but at last the fire of hostile infantry drove the cavalry back to Douzy. Towards evening the corps entered Mairy (headquarters), and distributed its troops over Douzy, Brevilly, and the villages to the south. The 23rd

Division on the right at Tétaigne and Lombut, the 24th Division on the left at Douzy and Brevilly. The Headquarters of the Meuse Army was established at Mouzon.

The IV. Corps had halted in rendezvous formation to the west of Mouzon, and was originally ordered to proceed to Remilly. Since the I. Bavarian Corps had anticipated it at that point, the corps was compelled to go into quarters in the evening in the same district they had hitherto occupied, which extended to the north as far as Autrécourt and Villers-devant-Mouzon. Its action on this day was therefore limited to collecting the numerous war material lying on the battle-field of the preceding day, and apprehending a number of stragglers from the enemy.

The Meuse Army now had passed nine very fatiguing days, for it had been on the march since the 23rd August. The XII. Army Corps alone had had a day of rest at Dun on the 28th, which, however, was of questionable character, for in anticipation of an attack it had remained all day in readiness for battle. The Guard and IV. Corps had made fatiguing marches on all of the nine days. On some, for instance the 26th and 31st August, the Guard Corps had made such forced marches as are seldom required of troops. The IV. and XII. Corps had fought a battle during the same period, and had traversed a distance equal to a long day's march during the fight. You may well imagine the state of exhaustion and fatigue of the troops by the evening of the 31st August. Once before I pointed out to you that the Guard Corps, which had numbered 20,027 infantry on the 22nd August, now had only 13,000 infantry available, 7000 men had been rendered temporarily *hors de combat* by fatigue. I do not know what the losses of the IV. and XII. Corps were from fatigue (excluding the battle of Beaumont), but they cannot have been very small. The troops had attained the object of their efforts; for the enemy's road to the east as far as

the Belgian frontier had been barred, in accordance with the orders of 11 p.m. of the 30th August, from the Royal Headquarters. The consciousness of having done this gave the troops a feeling of quiet. But to this feeling was added that of needing rest, and it was well justified. The Commander of the Meuse Army therefore applied to the Supreme Command for a day's halt for the 1st September, provided the enemy did not attack on that day. The troops were informed of this application, and were instructed what to do in case of attack. The Guard Corps was to hold the section Pouru aux Bois—Pouru St. Remy, and ascertain the intentions of the enemy on the 1st September by an early reconnaissance.

Affairs went very differently with the Third Army. The 4th Cavalry Division began the pursuit at 5 a.m., advanced on Remilly, drove back closed bodies of the enemy's cavalry at Wadelincourt, captured many stragglers, was fired on by artillery from the right bank of the Meuse, and turned off to Frénois, from which it dislodged the enemy. The horse batteries fired with effect on the railway station at Sedan, and on the trains passing between Sedan and Mézières; the enemy suspended the traffic and evacuated the station.

The I. Bavarian Corps received the orders at 6.30 a.m., and marched off at 8 a.m. At Remilly it was fired on by infantry from the further bank of the Meuse, and saw hostile columns marching to the north of the river from Carignan and Douzy towards Sedan. An ever increasing line of German artillery was formed at Remilly and to the north-west, which compelled the hostile columns to turn off to the north. The enemy answered the fire by constantly increasing their line of guns, and attempted to destroy the railway bridge at Bazeilles below Remilly. The 4th Rifle Battalion prevented them from accomplishing this object by occupying the bridge and penetrating as far as Bazeilles. The enemy now attacked the northern

edge of the village, which was successfully defended by the riflemen, until General v. d. Tann (who in the meantime had several bridges thrown across the river) ordered them back to the bridges (3.30 p.m.) because their isolated advance on this day could have no lasting result. The Corps bivouacked on the left bank of the Meuse as soon as it was informed that the Meuse Army would halt on the line Pouru aux Bois—Pouru St. Remy. The XI. Corps had marched to Donchéry, and finding the bridge intact, occupied the place with its advance guard, drove hostile infantry from Vrine-sur-Meuse and the mill at Rigas on the north bank of the Meuse, posted outposts there, and bivouacked with its main body south of Donchéry, after making a second bridge to the west of this town. The inhabitants of Donchéry stated that empty trains had passed from Sedan to Mézières to bring troops up from the latter place.

The Wurttemberg Division met insignificant hostile forces at Boutaucourt and Flize, drove them back in the direction of Mézières, and, after placing outposts between Eclair and Chalandry, posted the remainder of its troops at Flize, Boutaucourt and Etrépigny.

The 6th Cavalry Division moved to Poix, destroyed at that place the railroad Reims-Mézières, and continued its march to Boulzicourt. At Yvernaumont hostile infantry and cavalry were encountered, and driven back towards Mézières; the infantry, however, took up a position in the wood east of Yvernaumont, and prevented any further advance of our cavalry. The latter posted outposts between Yvernaumont and Villers-sur-le-Mont, bivouacked at Poix, and dispatched a detachment westward to Launois. After dark the hostile infantry withdrew to Mézières.

The 5th Cavalry Division moved from Tourteron against the railway line, a regiment of hussars being thrown forward beyond Attigny towards Reims.

The VI. Corps reached the vicinity of Semuy and

Attigny and destroyed the Reims-Mézières railway at Faux, because it had been used for the transport of French troops to Mézières.

Of the troops following in the second line the II. Bavarian Corps reached Raucourt, the leading troops of the V. Corps Chémery, and the 2nd Cavalry Division Chémery.

The Official Account gives a very clear survey of the situation on the evening of the 31st August. On the east and south-east the narrow space between the Meuse and the Belgian frontier was barred to the French Army, crowding round Sedan, by the Meuse Army. Closely connected with the latter and to the south of Sedan were four army corps (I. and II. Bavarian, V. and XI. Corps), and two cavalry divisions of the Third Army, their advanced parties close to the Meuse, ready to oppose any advance of the enemy to the south, or, if this did not take place, to attack him in a northerly direction. For the latter purpose the bridges over the Meuse at Bazeilles and Donchéry were available. The Wurttemberg Division with the 6th Cavalry Division, and the VI. Army Corps with the 5th Cavalry Division, protected the left flank in the direction of Mézières and Reims.

Whilst the Meuse Army generally was of the opinion that, having accomplished its task, the time had arrived to grant the fatigued troops a day of rest, the Third Army recognized from the appearance of hostile troops from the direction of Mézières, from the railway traffic between Reims, Mézières, and Sedan, that the enemy was intending either to bring reinforcements from Mézières to Sedan, or to escape from Sedan by way of Mézières. From the reports received it became clear that, if the results of the battle of Beaumont were to be fully utilized, the 1st September could not be allowed to pass without cutting off the hostile troops at Mézières from those at Sedan by an advance to the north from Donchéry. In this case it was indispensable that the Meuse

Army should hold the enemy fast by an attack from the east to prevent our troops, crossing at Donchéry, from coming between two fires and being thus exposed to annihilation.

I will not make further inquiries to-day into the motives which led to the 1st September, but I shall criticize the strategical measures of the German armies executed on the 31st August. They may be summed up in the few words that the Guard Corps on the right and the XI. Corps and the Wurttemberg Division on the left energetically carried out an indirect pursuit of the defeated enemy, whilst the centre of the German forces followed up the enemy as he retreated, and that, with the exception of the capture of stragglers and abandoned baggage, the only engagement in the pursuit of the enemy worth mentioning was fought at the bridge of Bazeilles. Here you may perhaps concur in the criticism so often repeated, that the Germans did not pursue their enemy sufficiently in the war of 1870. You might say perhaps that if the IV. Corps had attacked Mouzon early on the 31st August, after occupying the bridge—if the XII. Corps had advanced simultaneously against Mouzon on the right bank of the Meuse, whilst the Guard Corps moved against Carignan-Tétaigne and Brevilly without making such a detour to the right—if the I. Bavarian Corps had advanced from Raucourt against Remilly and Bazeilles—if the V. Corps had moved from La Besace through Bulson on Wadelincourt in line with the XI. Corps advancing on Frénois and Donchéry, so that only one corps (II. Bavarian) remained in the second line—that then the victory of the 30th August could have been fully utilized on the 31st. Considering the actual operations of the French corps, I must concede that you are right. If this movement had been begun at daybreak, more of the stragglers and baggage of the enemy would have been overtaken and captured on this side of the line of the Meuse and Chiers. It would have been possible to cross this

line on the afternoon of the 31st August by the bridges of Bazeilles, Douzy, Brevilly, and Tétaigne, to attack and perhaps defeat the 1st French Corps on the march, and the intact troops of the 12th Corps, or at the least to place them in such a predicament that they would have been unable to offer any resistance on the 1st September, for the line of the Meuse and Chiers was not further than 7 or 9 miles from the first line of the German corps. The troops of the French 5th and 7th Corps would in that case not have been sufficiently rested on the 31st August to restore their efficiency for battle. It is very easy to say this now that we know how the French corps were posted. But who was able to tell the Supreme Command of the German Army early on the 31st August, the position of the 1st French Corps and Margueritte's Cavalry Division? Might not the 5th as well as the 12th Corps have been in position on the east of Mouzon ready to overwhelm the German troops crossing the river? In that case it was much safer and more prudent that the Meuse Army should make sure of passing the defile at Mouzon by throwing two corps over to the right bank of the Meuse, and then pursue the enemy in the angle between the Chiers and the former river before operating in the country north of the latter. By acting as they did, the German troops proceeded with greater care and deliberation, and were at the same time the better able to accomplish their task—the complete annihilation of the enemy's army, even though one day may have been lost.

What would have been the result of acting as indicated above? The remainder of the 12th Corps and parts of the 1st Corps might perhaps have been thrown in confusion, while the 5th and 7th Corps disturbed in their quarters, would have remained inefficient for battle, this being due partly to fatigue, partly to the unsuccessful action. In that case, however, the French Army would have continued its movement on Mézières on the afternoon of the 31st August, though partly routed. This

retreat would have been continued on the 1st September, and a large portion of the French Army would have reached Mézières. We should not have succeeded in completely surrounding the French Army. When you think this over you will concur in my opinion that the actual disposition of the troops was the best for all cases, both those which did happen, as well as those which might have happened. Rational strategy must take all possibilities into consideration, even though the latter are not mentioned in orders. A headlong and precipitate pursuit of the French Army with all available forces after the battle of Beaumont would have been correct if the road to the interior of France lay straight in rear and open to the latter, as for instance after the battle of Waterloo, or like the allies after the battle of Austerlitz. Then it would have been necessary to overtake as many of the hostile forces as possible, to bring them to bay, and to defeat them again. Greater results were gained here by enveloping both flanks of the enemy, and by allowing those corps of the centre which had fought a severe battle on the 30th August to regain on the 31st August their greatest possible strength for a new and obstinate battle. For every body of troops is bound to be temporarily weakened in many respects, even by a victorious battle. Numerical losses frequently cannot be compared with the loss by disorganization caused by the death of the leaders, the dispersion of the infantry in skirmishing over the country, the mixing of the men of different units. Sometimes a whole day must be spent in restoring order. (The IV. Corps lost 126 officers and 2878 men in the battle of Beaumont.)

I cannot refrain from pointing out to you the superiority which the strategy of the German armies gained by being provided with ample bridging material, while the French had none. The French corps were much impeded in their movements, had to make detours, lost time, and underwent great exertions at the places where

no bridges over the Meuse existed. This river can hardly be said to have formed an obstacle for the German troops, as bridges were built where none existed, sometimes at night whilst the troops were resting. The greater the progress of technical inventions, the more carefully should the supreme command provide the troops with all necessary material before the opening of the campaign. Precipitation at the beginning, which causes troops to be put in the field without being completely equipped, can only have the most disastrous consequences, as you see from the action of the French Regency on the 22nd August, and also at the beginning of the war.

We left the French Army on the night of the 30th August concentrating north of Sedan, covered by the 1st Corps, which was posted with a cavalry division on the north bank of the Chiers. The retreat had not been completed by daybreak on the 31st August, as may be proved by the loot collected by the German troops on that morning to the south of Douzy and Sedan. We may assume that the 5th and 7th Corps were incapable of active operations. Nor was it possible to expect on the 31st August a good day's march from all the parts of the 12th Corps, since the latter had retired *via* Douzy by a night march obstructed by many checks, and had become engaged with the I. Bavarian Corps at Bazeilles before completing its march. Only the 1st Army Corps and the two cavalry divisions were thoroughly fit for action on this day.

General Vinoy had reached Mézières with one division on the evening of the 30th. His corps, the 13th, consisting of 37 battalions, 8 squadrons, and 15 batteries, does not seem to have been completely assembled there by this date. Some troops of Exéa's division were moved from Reims to Mézières by rail on the 31st August. The aide-de-camp who reached Sedan on the 31st August only reported the arrival of the leading troops of the corps.

The Official Account states that the French Commander-in-Chief was very undecided about his plans for the 31st, and also surmises that the extent of the threatening danger had not been realized. I must differ from the Official Account as regards this latter opinion. The Emperor and Marshal MacMahon intended to move the Army back to Mézières. If the Emperor staked the safety of his troops on the hope that the Germans might be unaware of the road from Sedan to Mézières on the right bank of the Meuse, it would in my opinion be merely an indication of the hopelessness of his position, for he could hardly suppose that the German commanders considered the country to the north of the Meuse to be an impassable roadless desert. On the other hand, I should think that he had sufficient proof that the German corps could move on any road, and were not restricted to the high roads for their advance.

Orders were issued to the 7th Corps to take up a position in rear of the Floing, with its right at Illy, Bonnemain's Cavalry Division on its left, the 12th Corps on the heights of Balan and La Moncelle, whilst the 5th Corps assembled in its former camp north of Sedan and re-formed as best it could. The 1st Corps was ordered to leave its position on the Chiers (Carignan, &c.), and move to the heights west of the Givonne valley, and to take up a position opposite Daigny, fronting east. Margueritte's Cavalry Division was ordered to camp near Illy.

This position formed a triangle, defended on the south by the fortress of Sedan and a part of the 12th Corps, on the east by the rest of the 12th and the 1st Corps, and on the west by the 7th Corps and Bonnemain's Cavalry Division. The other cavalry division was encamped at the northern angle, while within the triangle the 5th Corps was assembling to re-form after its defeat, and then to act as a general reserve. The sides of the triangle were less than 5 miles long, and the depth of the same about 3 miles. The space on which the army was con-

centrated amounted, therefore, to a little over 6 square miles. This concentration of such a large army and the shape of the position facing in all directions reminds one of a battalion square which, on being attacked on all sides by cavalry, fires desperately in all directions in the hope of being succoured by other troops, or of at least saving its honour by resistance to the last. The very fact that MacMahon selected such a position proves that he was well aware of the extent of the danger threatening his army.

I cannot blame the Marshal for selecting it. Had I been in his place I should not have been able to suggest anything better. The 5th and 7th Corps had been forced north of Sedan by the course of events, and were unable to move further on the 31st August. The 12th Corps had covered the retreat of the 5th Corps over the Chiers, and had acted as its rear guard during a night march. What else remained for the Marshal to do but to bring up the 1st Corps from Carignan, etc., in order to steady his other three exhausted corps, one of which had almost been dispersed, with the only intact troops at his disposal?

What else do you think MacMahon should have done? Perhaps continue the offensive to the east? Only two divisions of the 1st Corps and Margueritte's Cavalry Division were available for such a purpose. They might reach the vicinity of Montmédy on the 31st August. The remaining two divisions of the Corps would have come in contact on the march with the Prussian Guard Corps crossing at Linay. The remaining three corps were incapable of moving, having fought and marched for 24 hours. The whole army would have been annihilated. The exhausted main body would have been exposed to the danger of falling helplessly into the hands of a small hostile force; the insignificant force of one cavalry and two infantry divisions could not possibly have relieved Metz. They would have fallen into the hands of the

German troops sent in pursuit from Mouzon, or detached from the Army investing Metz to meet them.

Might MacMahon perhaps have attempted an offensive to the south on the 31st August? The only available troops would have again been those of the 1st Corps. Advancing from Carignan and Tétaigne, the latter would have encountered the Guard and XII. Corps, supported by the IV. Corps, at Mouzon. The 1st Corps at Carignan was, however, too far away to debouch from Sedan to the south on this date.

The march to Mézières remains now to be considered. What portions of his force were to commence this movement? We know that the 5th and 7th Corps were too exhausted to move on the 31st August. I believe they were in such a state of exhaustion, that if they had been ordered early on the 31st, a "*saue qui peut à Mézières,*" not a man would have been able to stir. Just as the leading troops of the 12th Corps were reaching their destination on the heights of Balan and La Moncelle, they became engaged with the I. Bavarian Corps, whose artillery compelled the columns to turn off to the north, and whose 4th rifle battalion occupied Bazeilles in the afternoon. Since the 12th Corps was thus held in check at Bazeilles, only the 1st Corps and two cavalry divisions remained available. Half of these troops would have had to perform a forced march to reach Vigne aux Bois from Carignan. This Corps would thus have exposed the troops most in need of protection to the danger of being pursued by the enemy's troops nearest to them. You will therefore probably agree with me that nothing could be done but to bring up the half of the 1st Corps from Carignan to where the other half was, and thus support the 12th Corps at noon on the 31st against the Bavarians who had penetrated into Bazeilles.

In my opinion we cannot but approve of the decision of the Emperor and the Marshal to move the army, if possible, back to Mézières. The fact that Wimpffen in-

sisted that the army should cut its way out to Carignan and Montmédy, appears to me to be the result of the definite and impracticable instructions which may have been given him by the Regency, who feared a revolution in the metropolis. I will mention this plan in my next letter in discussing the battle of Sedan.

We will only consider here what might have been done on the 31st August to prepare for the retreat on Mézières after it had been determined on. The Emperor's opinion that the Germans would be unable to throw sufficient forces on the right bank of the Meuse at Donchéry to prevent the march of the French Army to Mézières, was wholly unjustified after Vinoy's aide-de-camp had reported to him at 10 a.m. that columns of all arms were approaching Donchéry from the south, and that the railway Mézières-Sedan had already been fired on by German batteries. Had not MacMahon intended to move the whole army across the Meuse on the 30th August? If the German troops were given time, they might move any number of men over the Meuse at Donchéry within twenty-four hours. Moreover, at 5 p.m. a report was received from Douay that the enemy was preparing to cross the Meuse at Dom-le-Mesnil and Donchéry. Yet no action whatever was taken.

What could the exhausted Army have done? The 5th, 7th, and 12th Corps were absolutely unable to march in the direction of Donchéry; but the two divisions of the 1st Corps which had marched in the early morning only from Douzy to Givonne might have been ordered at 10 a.m. to move on the same day to Vrine-aux-Bois. This march of not quite 15 miles would not have been excessive for these intact troops. Moreover, General Vinoy might have received orders by telegraph, or by his aide-de-camp, to march 7 miles on the same day towards the army with all effective troops, instead of directing him by telegraph to assemble his corps at Mézières. Bonnemain's Cavalry Division might

also have been sent there on this day; it was entirely fresh, and might have been followed early on the 1st September by the other cavalry division from Illy. In this manner 3 or 4 infantry and 2 cavalry divisions might have been concentrated in a position south of Vrine-aux-Bois opposite Donchéry, and might have considerably delayed, if not completely checked the advance of the Prussian V. and XI. Corps. But this measure entailed the decision to begin the march to Mézières on the morning of the 1st September with the 5th Corps, followed by the 7th and 12th Corps, with the remaining half of the 1st Corps forming a rear guard to check pursuit from the east. The order issued early on the 1st September, found on the battle-field, ran thus: "The whole army will rest to-day;" not at all in accordance with the desperate situation of the army.

In fact, nothing was done to render possible the retreat to Mézières which the Emperor and the Marshal had informed General Vinoy was about to take place. I can explain this only by the apathy of despair to which the Marshal may have abandoned himself. He had been compelled to act against his better judgment; his army had been placed in the worst possible situation; his authority had been undermined by the Ministry during the defeat at Beaumont, who sent General de Wimpffen, and on the 31st August he does not seem to have been the sole Commander-in-Chief. How can the action of the Emperor be otherwise explained who issued orders though he had handed the supreme command over to Marshal MacMahon? This put a stop to any exercise of the command by the Marshal. At one time he was to issue orders, then he received absurd orders from the ministers of the Emperor, who was present and knew his intentions. The Emperor was treated as such a nonentity by the Regency and the Ministry, that they dared to remove his chief favourite (Faily) and replace him by another general (Wimpffen). Then again, the

Emperor interfered with the command, and telegraphed his orders direct to Vinoy. I can well imagine that MacMahon was put in such a frame of mind, that he was glad to ride into the close-range hostile fire on the morning of the 1st September.

The 31st August ended on the French side in the Army taking up the triangular position which I have described above, and a brigade occupied Bazeilles after the Bavarian rifles had been withdrawn by Tann's order. Not a single patrol was sent on the 31st August to Donchéry, which was the most important point of all.

THIRTY-SECOND LETTER.

THE 1ST SEPTEMBER.—SEDAN.

(*See Plan No. V.*)

FROM a strategical point of view it seems peculiar that neither of the opposing Commanders-in-Chief issued special dispositions on the evening preceding the battle of Sedan. You would completely misunderstand me if you think I accuse the German Supreme Command of suddenly relinquishing all influence over the course of events and letting things run their course. On the contrary! It simply considered the order of 11 p.m. on the 30th August sufficient for both Armies and reserved the right of interference, either by word of mouth or in writing, should an emergency arise.

The first instance of the latter was the discussion between the Supreme Command and the Commander of the Third Army on the evening of the 31st August. The King had proceeded on the 30th August to the height of Sommauthe, thence to Raucourt and to Vendresse *vid* Chémery, where the Royal Headquarters was established. But the Headquarters of the Third Army was also at Chémery, and thus the two met. The result of this meeting was the order issued at 9 p.m. on the 31st August by the Third Army, which is so important and so significant of the view then taken, that I shall give it here in full (Official Account, Part I., Vol. II., Appendix 46):—

“ Headquarters Chémery,

“ August 31st, 1870.

“ 9 p.m.

“ In order to check the enemy, who may attempt to retreat from Sedan to Mézières on the right bank of the Meuse, and to make his further retreat impossible, part of the army will cross the Meuse to-morrow, September 1st, at Dom-le-Mesnil and Donchéry.

“ The following movements will be executed :

“ 1. The XI. Corps will march before daybreak in the direction of Vrigne-aux-Bois *via* Donchéry, where it will take up a position in rear of the brook to prevent the enemy marching to Mézières between the Meuse and the Belgian frontier.

“ 2. The V. Corps will march from its bivouac at 5 a.m. and follow the XI. Corps through Donchéry, closing up on that corps so that its right wing is pushed in advance of the Vrigne. The artillery is to be posted so as to command the road Vrigne-Sedan.

“ 3. The Wurttemberg Division will bridge the river at Dom-le-Mesnil during the night, cross at daybreak, take up a position fronting toward Mézières, and at the same time act as a reserve to the XI. Corps. The bridge when thrown is to be held by troops.

“ 4. Of the II. Bavarian Corps, one division will start at 5 a.m., advance through Bulson on Frénois; the Reserve Artillery will be placed on the heights on the left bank of the Meuse opposite Donchéry. It is to march with the leading troops. The other division will pass Noyers and take up a position between Frénois and Wadelincourt to prevent the enemy from leaving the fortress.

“ 5. The I. Bavarian Corps will remain at Remilly unless the advance of the Crown Prince of Saxony renders it necessary to support him.

“ 6. The 6th Cavalry Division will start from Mazerny at 5 a.m. and advance through Boutaucourt and Boulzi-

court to Flize on the Meuse, where it will remain until further orders.

"7. The 4th Cavalry Division will assemble south of Frénois and wait for orders.

"8. The 2nd Cavalry Division will leave its cantonments at 6 a.m. and march to Boutaucourt, taking up a position south of this place.

"9. The 5th Cavalry Division and the VI. Corps will remain in their cantonments.

"Reports to the Army Commander will be sent to Frénois. The transport and supply columns will remain stationary for the present. The Headquarters will remain at Chémery.

"By order: (sd.) v. BLUMENTHAL."

It appears from this disposition that it was intended to post the left wing of the Third Army on the west of the enemy just as the two corps of the right wing of the Meuse Army had been posted on the east of the enemy on the evening of the 31st August, thus barring the road of the French Army in both directions. When this had been accomplished, further measures could be taken.

Here again the conception of the Supreme Command (as expressed in the order issued by the commander of the Third Army after the interview) was entirely in accordance with that of the Meuse Army, which on occupying its position on the evening of the 31st August asked to be allowed to rest for one day. The neighbouring I. Bavarian Corps had been ordered to halt unless the Meuse Army should require its assistance. On the whole the instruction merely ordered 2½ corps to be pushed beyond the Meuse like a wedge between Sedan and Mézières, the two cavalry divisions to form a screen towards Mézières; one Bavarian division to be posted at Donchéry as a reserve for the troops which crossed over, the other division of the II. Bavarian Corps to block the southern issue from Sedan, and the I. Bavarian Corps to act as a

general reserve at the disposal of the Meuse Army. The VI. Corps and the 5th Cavalry Division were to cover the Army toward Reims. Had it been known that all the troops had been moved from Reims to Mézières, a brigade of cavalry would have been thought sufficient for that purpose, and the VI. Corps and 5th Cavalry Division would have been brought up closer, perhaps to Poix. One cavalry division (4th) was held in reserve for a battle. This division also changed its *rôle* as soon as the advanced infantry of each side came into contact. The day before it had pursued, to-day it became a reserve for battle.

The view taken by the Supreme Command was greatly modified by the reports which arrived at Vendresse on the evening of the 31st August. Lieut.-Colonel v. Brandenstein (one of the general staff officers whom it was customary for the Royal Headquarters to send to the most important points and who were familiar with the intentions of the Supreme Command) reported on his return from Remilly to Vendresse that the enemy seemed to be retiring in great haste to Mézières, abandoning all his baggage. He had observed dense columns north of the line Chiers-Meuse moving westward, which turned to the north to avoid the artillery fire of the Bavarians. If the remainder of the hostile forces had taken the same direction unobserved and preceded those observed by Lieut.-Colonel v. Brandenstein, only the utmost haste could enable the left wing of the Third Army to reach Vrigne-aux-Bois in time. Nor was it beyond the range of possibility that the troops which were crossing at Donchéry might be caught between two fires at Vrigne-aux-Bois, from St. Albert and Mézières, if the whole French Army was moving on Mézières in order of battle on the afternoon of the 31st August, for we possessed no accurate knowledge about the exhaustion of portions of that Army. In order to prevent the French from marching westward with the whole of their forces on the 1st September, it was neces-

sary to attack them from the east in the morning as early as possible.

The Supreme Command at Vendresse despatched a letter containing these instructions at 8 p.m. to the headquarters of the Third Army at Chémery, where it arrived at 9 p.m. just as the orders were being issued, so that the latter could be supplemented accordingly.

It seems that the Supreme Command also despatched a letter to the Meuse Army, which, however, is not mentioned in the Official Account, probably because its instructions had been executed by the time it arrived. I shall revert to this later on.

The Third Army supplemented its dispositions by adding that those portions on the left wing, which had been ordered to cross the Meuse, should do so during the night if possible, and that on the right the I. Bavarian Corps should hold the enemy in check, with permission to make an independent attack prior to that of the Meuse Army. These additions to the orders accelerated the movements of those troops which were to intercept the enemy on the west, and aimed at an attack on the enemy from the east. By a singular coincidence the two former commanders of volunteers in the Schleswig campaign in 1848 (v. Gersdorff and v. d. Tann) were the first to initiate with their corps (XI. and I. Bavarian) the enveloping movement which led to the crushing victory of Sedan, that victory which laid the foundation of German unity.

The Commander of the Third Army despatched to the Crown Prince of Saxony a statement of all the measures he had taken, and pointed out that if the Meuse Army advanced the events of the day might become even more favourable.

The latter was hoping, as we know, for a much-needed day of rest for his army, when he received the communication of Prince Frederick Charles at 1 a.m. No reply had yet been received from the Supreme Command to his

request for a day of rest. At 1.45 a.m. the following disposition was issued from Mouzon to the several corps :—

“ Headquarters Mouzon, September 1st, 1870.

“ 1.45 a.m.

“ Dispositions for the 1st September :

“ There is good reason to believe that the enemy will attempt to retire during the night on the road Sedan-Mézières, abandoning all his baggage.

“ A part of the Third Army is about to cross the Meuse before daybreak at Bazeilles, Dom le Mesnil and Donchéry and attack the enemy on the road Sedan-Mézières.

“ The following are the orders for the corps of this Army :

“ 1. The Guard Corps will assemble at once, and send one of its divisions by Escombres and Pouru-aux-Bois to Villers-Cernay, the other division by Sachy and Pouru St. Remy to Francheval ; the Corps Artillery to be attached to the latter division.

“ 2. The XII. Corps will assemble at once on the high-road south of Douzy and advance in the direction of La Moncelle *viâ* Lamécourt.

“ 3. The attack will commence about 5 a.m. by at least the advance guards from Pouru-aux-Bois, Pouru St. Remy and Douzy. The main bodies to follow as soon and as closely as possible. The three columns of attack will keep up communication with each other.

“ 4. The IV. Corps will move one division and the Corps Artillery to Remilly-sur-Meuse to support the I. Bavarian Corps if necessary, in its attack on Bazeilles. The other division will cross the Meuse at Mouzon and advance on the right bank to Mairy, forming a general reserve.

“ This corps will also march off as soon as possible.

“ 5. All transport and baggage to remain halted, knapsacks to be left with them.

"6. Reports will reach me on the height east of Amblimont.

"(Sd.) ALBERT, Crown Prince of Saxony, General of Infantry.

"True copy (sd.) v. SCHLOTHEIM, Major-General."

You will perhaps take it as a matter of course, that the commander of the Meuse Army should accept at once and to the fullest extent the suggestion of the Third Army. Anyone who knows how the battle of Sedan was won by the Germans will declare it to be impossible that the former commander should not have hastened to share in this great success. But just place yourself in the position of the Commander-in-Chief of the Meuse Army before the battle. After a very fatiguing day he had asked for a day of rest for his army which had endured the utmost fatigues for nine consecutive days. One-third of the infantry had fallen exhausted by the wayside. He thought that the remaining two-thirds would soon suffer the same fate unless they had some rest. He knew that his army was in position to prevent the enemy from marching to the east and expected the other army to do the same to the west. To execute this was the task set for the 1st September; after that the enemy could not escape. Why not gather strength by a day of rest and strike a decisive blow on the 2nd September? Such perhaps were his thoughts when he retired to rest late at night. At 1 o'clock that night he is aroused by a communication from the other army commander, to whom he was in no way subordinate, to the effect that he intends not only to execute as ordered the movement to the west of the enemy, but also to attack the latter from the east, and points out that a simultaneous movement by the Meuse Army would lead to still more favourable results. Many a leader would have thought: "If he wants to attack, that is his look-out. I have occupied my position as directed. My army wants a day of

rest ; I have asked for it, and I am going to wait for a reply. I will not ruin my army by such rashness, and I shall not attack on the 1st September unless ordered to do so." Subsequent events justify you in declaring such arguments to be narrow-minded, and I by no means consider them correct. However, history teaches us that it would have been human nature. Did not Archduke John of Austria leave his brother in the lurch at Wagram ? How did Bernadotte behave at Grossbeeren, Dennewitz and Leipsic ? Did Wellington assist the Prussian army at Ligny ?¹ But what about Blucher two days later at Waterloo ? you will say. That is just what I am driving at. The spirit of Blucher was not allowed to die out among the Germans, and this won the victory of Sedan. The Commander of the Meuse Army could not have hesitated one second in deciding. At 1 o'clock he was awakened by the communication from the Third Army. Within the next three-quarters of an hour, in the middle of the night, the clerks were roused and set to work, the communication studied by the map and the orders drafted and dictated. No indecision can have caused any loss of time. The commander of the Meuse Army acted as Blucher did at the battle of Waterloo.

I stated above that an order was sent from the Supreme Command to the Meuse Army. I do not remember its contents exactly, but I believe that it was the reply to the request for a day of rest, and I remember that the order reached the Guard Corps on the 1st September when we were already engaged. The order directed us to do the very things we had done, and exactly in the manner in which they had been executed. This order arrived five hours later than the communication from the Third Army. Just imagine how the battle of Sedan would have been fought if the whole of the Meuse Army had come into action five hours later. The Germans would eventually have been

¹ He did not because he could not.—ED.

victorious, but with far greater losses. The I. Bavarian Corps in particular would have been almost annihilated before support could have arrived. Anyhow, you will admit, that it required no little self-denial on the part of the Commander of the Meuse Army to act as he did. He was obliged to give up his own ideas, and to adopt those of the Supreme Command, to consider only the interest of the army as a whole, ignoring his own, even the duty of preserving the army entrusted to his care. He did even more. He not only accepted the suggestion of the Third Army without a moment's delay, but, fearing that the I. Bavarian Corps might encounter a much superior force and be exposed to danger, he detached a division and the Corps Artillery of the IV. Corps to support it.

Our sole purpose in criticizing these operations, whether favourably or adversely, is to learn something from them. What does this decision of the Meuse Army teach us? That in war you should consider yourself only as a fraction of the *whole*, whenever a strategical decision is to be formed. For instance, when a commander separated from his superior has to decide whether one measure or another should be taken, the welfare of the *whole* must be considered first even if his own troops have to be sacrificed; the only question to be decided is whether the loss would be proportional to the success which it is hoped thereby to achieve.

Before we consider the strategical measures taken during the battle of Sedan, let us inquire into the ideas prevailing at the French headquarters early in the morning on the 1st September, previous to the battle.

No French dispositions for this day exist, as I mentioned before; but we know that the Emperor and the Marshal concurred in the plan of leading the Army back to Mézières. At any rate they both expressed this intention to the aide-de-camp of General Vinoy on the

31st August. It appears, however, to be contradicted by the unopened order found on the battle-field: "The whole army will rest to-day." The Marshal stated at the "enquête parlementaire" that he would have decided on some plan at 6 a.m., if his wound had not prevented him. He thought he might still have been able to advance to the east. On the other hand he states that the order issued by General Ducrot to march to Mézières might still have been executed at 8 a.m., in case of failure part of the troops might have made their escape through the forests, or at the worst crossed over the Belgian frontier; that these movements had become difficult by 9 a.m. and impossible by noon. Discard all knowledge of the actual state of affairs, which you are now in possession of, and you will arrive at the following result which reconciles all the seeming contradictions contained in these statements.

On the 31st August the idea prevailed of leading the army back to Mezières. The time of commencing the movement had not been decided on the 31st August, otherwise a march table would have been issued on the evening of that day. On the contrary, the sight of the exhausted condition of the troops as they moved into their positions, the urgent necessity of providing food for them, and the reports of the officers on the condition of their troops, seem to have convinced the Marshal that he could not very well order the Army to march on the 1st September; he therefore issued the order: "The whole army will rest to-day."

The following reasons may have led him to believe that the enemy would permit this rest. If the enemy crossed at Donchéry and opposed him north of the Meuse between Sedan and Mezières, the Marshal believed that he could easily prevent the enemy from issuing from the defile of St. Albert and that he would find the road open to the east and to Bazaine; if the enemy should attack from the east, he believed that he would be able to retire to the west. Apparently he did not think that

the enemy was sufficiently strong to attack vigorously from east and west at the same time. The statement of Napoleon to Vinoy's aide-de-camp, that he did not believe that the enemy could throw sufficient forces over the Meuse at Donch  ry, seems to indicate that Napoleon and the Marshal under-estimated the German forces. This is confirmed by the statement Napoleon made after the battle, that the Army of Prince Frederick Charles must have been engaged and that Bazaine was on his heels, since so many German troops could not otherwise have taken part in the battle. After the capitulation the wounded Marshal stated that he had been frequently misled by the fact that the German Armies were led by two Crown Princes, and that the army of the "Crown Prince" was reported to him from all directions. It is possible that on the 1st September he still believed that only one Crown Prince had to be dealt with, who had defeated the 5th and 7th Corps at Beaumont, and that he counted on defeating him in detail if he divided his army for the purpose of advancing on the right and left of Sedan.

The position of the French Army, with its centre protected from the south by the fortress of Sedan and the inundations of the Meuse, compelled the enemy, approaching from the south, to divide his forces in order to attack on all sides. Thus it is possible that the Marshal, believing himself to be forced to remain inactive on the 1st September by the condition of his troops, was hoping for one of those "unforeseen occurrences" which sometimes enable the weaker army to reverse the situation. At any rate, the measures of the opponent were to decide the definite plan he intended to adopt on the 1st September for the next day, though it seemed probable on the 31st August that he would be forced to move back to M  zi  res. You must not forget the power of those orders from Paris which unceasingly forced him towards the east and which may have gained additional strength from the appearance

of Wimpffen. It is only thus that I can explain why he ordered a day of rest for the whole army on the 1st September and yet was justified in stating, before the *Enquête*, that he intended to decide on some plan at 6 a.m., thereby placing the chances of a retreat to the west or of an advance to the east on a par, notwithstanding that he had informed General Vinoy on the 31st August of his intention to retire on Mézières. The fact stated by Wimpffen, that he had sent his horses and personal effects to Mézières before daybreak on the 1st September, proves that the Marshal favoured the latter idea more than an advance to the east.

In reality it was no longer possible on the morning of the 1st September to retire on Mézières or to advance to the east. An escape to the west would have had some chances of success, as I stated in my last letter, if preparations had been made on the 31st August by moving three or four divisions of infantry and two divisions of cavalry to Vrigne-aux-Bois. Even then success was by no means certain, for these troops would have had to hold the German troops crossing at Donchéry in check for a very long time before the whole Army in rear could have marched away. According to the Official Account the strength of the Army on the morning of the 1st September was 124,000 men, exclusive of the troops which made their escape through the forests, estimated at 10,000; 100,000 men would thus have to march on the same road, since there is only one road leading through the defile of St. Albert. But from the head to the rear of a column of 100,000 men is a distance of more than three marches, if you omit the baggage. The Army would have required the whole of the 1st September, the following night and the whole of the 2nd September, to pass the defile of St. Albert. Was it possible to resist the German forces until then? Could it be expected that the Meuse Army on the east would quietly watch this retreat?

The offensive towards the east offered still less chance

of success. The French would have come in contact in the first place with the Prussian Guard, and would have been taken in flank by the XII. and I. Bavarian Corps. In this case the IV. Corps would have been close at hand, and able to support the Prussian Guard Corps according to circumstances *via* Brévilly, Tétaigne or Carignan, and the II. Bavarian Corps would have followed on the heels of the I. Though an offensive movement might have had some success in the beginning, the German troops would have been able to hold out until support arrived, and then the French troops would have been attacked in rear by the German corps which had crossed at Donchéry and marched through the defile of St. Albert. A large Kriegsspiel society worked out this case one winter. Careful calculations showed that the Army would probably have been surrounded and forced to capitulate in the vicinity of Pouru-aux-Bois. Even if the movement had carried the French Army as far east as Carignan or Montmédy, the question of what would have become of these troops without transport or supply columns must occur to every impartial observer. Not one of the French writers who subsequently discussed it in the press, has troubled himself to answer this second question. An offensive to the east had no chance whatever of lasting success.

The actual facts, as we know them now, furnish no proper basis for instructive inquiry into this decision of MacMahon's. We must consider these things in the light in which he saw them. Since he considered the greater part of the Army incapable of active operations on the 1st September and under-estimated the German forces, he had no option but to grant a day of rest on the 1st September and to make his plans for the 2nd September according to the enemy's measures, by which he might hope to save the Army, though at a great cost.

The Marshal was mistaken in both of these ideas, on which he based his conception of the situation. On the

1st September the Army was not so ineffective as he thought. That is proved by its obstinate resistance in the ensuing battle. On the other hand the German forces were sufficiently numerous to drive an attack home both on the east and west at the same time.

Can the Marshal be blamed for these two errors? He had only lately seen his forces completely dispersed after the battle of Woerth when they had to continue their retreat. It was therefore quite natural that he should consider a day's rest an imperative necessity for the troops defeated at Beaumont in order to prevent a recurrence of such a dispersion. It is very difficult for any commander to measure correctly the powers of his troops, when by mischance ordinary methods of procedure have been departed from. Regimental commanders are more apt to consider the well-being of their troops than the general strategical situation, and are inclined to prematurely declare rest and restoration of order an imperative necessity by painting their difficulties in the darkest colours. Did MacMahon have time to make a personal inspection? The disordered retreat, described by Wimpffen, of the 30th and 31st August could not have inspired him with confidence, and at 6 a.m. on the 1st September he was wounded and placed *hors de combat*. Nor would he have received a correct answer had he asked the soldiers. When asked in a body by their Commander, the men are generally ashamed to acknowledge their weakness and to try to appear stronger than they really are. I witnessed a case once in peace time when it was very hot, when the soldiers cried lustily that they were neither hot nor tired and could easily march farther; fifteen minutes later they fell out by dozens. However, we came to the conclusion on a former occasion that it is impossible to pass judgment on the orders issued after a great battle because no correct idea of the real condition and efficiency of the troops can be gained. In the case before us you must therefore either exonerate

the Marshal or abstain from any criticism. As regards his estimate of the German forces available for battle on the 1st September, it corresponded to that of the Emperor and the other leaders. The Emperor himself believed it impossible that a considerable German force would be able to cross the Meuse at Donchéry on the night before the 1st September. Nor is it impossible that the opinion prevailed at the French headquarters that only the Meuse Army had fought at Beaumont. Wimpffen also was of this opinion. Considerable forces of only three corps were engaged in this battle, and the advance guard of another (V.). The Ministry at Paris had assured the Marshal that he had a start of 36 to 48 hours in front of the Crown Prince of Prussia. If he measured the marching powers of the German troops by those of his own, he might hope to have sufficient time on the 1st September to send troops in advance to Vigne-aux-Bois and to order Vinoy's troops to meet them there, in case he should decide to march on Mézières on the 2nd September covered by them.

The only thing I am unable to explain is that nothing was done early on the 1st September to occupy at least the defile of St. Albert, if only with relatively small forces (perhaps a division). Under the circumstances this defile became almost a Thermopylæ for the French. Douay had reported on the afternoon of the 31st August that the enemy was preparing to bridge the river at Donchéry and Dom-le-Mesnil. MacMahon knew therefore that the enemy intended to cross over. If the latter succeeded in reaching this defile even with comparatively small forces, he might delay the whole French Army there sufficiently long to ensure its destruction if a retreat on Mézières had been decided on. On the other hand a comparatively small French force would be able to detain the enemy approaching from Donchéry much longer than Douay's whole Corps in the Bois de Garenne if the idea of an offensive to the east had been resumed, as the Marshal

himself stated at the *Enquête*. From the material at our disposal it is impossible to decide who was responsible for this neglect, it is also a matter of indifference to us since we do not intend to criticize individuals. I think, however, that if a German corps commander of 1870 had been posted on the Floing brook in Douay's place, he would have occupied the defile of St. Albert with a division not later than the early morning, on his own responsibility and without orders. But the prevailing system of command in the French Army was not calculated to incite the subordinate leaders to such spontaneous action.

Instead of occupying this defile nothing whatever was done to oppose the enemy, who was reported to be at Donchéry on the afternoon of the 31st August. No particular benefit could be derived from sending two officers from headquarters to this region on the 1st September; for the enemy might have reached the defile before they could have formed an opinion and returned with their report.

In now turning as usual to what happened with the Guard Corps, I must limit myself more strictly than hitherto to mentioning only what is directly or indirectly connected with the strategical measures. For if I were to write down all the interesting events of this day, I should never come to an end.

In accordance with the instructions received from the Army Headquarters the Corps Commander despatched the order to rouse the troops at 4 a.m. on the 1st September and directed that the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard was to form the right column and to march through Pouru-aux-Bois to Villers Cernay, whilst the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard with the Corps Artillery was to form the left column and to march through Sachy on Francheval. The General Commanding started before 5 a.m. at a rapid pace to overtake the advance guards and

to get a good view of the country before the battle commenced. He followed the high road in the valley as far as Pouru St. Remy and then turned to the north, uphill, toward Francheval. The valley was so obscured by the morning mist, that nothing could be seen at a distance of more than a few hundred paces. We heard the noise of the battle straight in front of us, from the vicinity of Bazeilles. It indicated that prompt assistance would be welcome. The Corps Commander therefore sent orders to the rear to the Corps Artillery to advance at a trot and to place itself at the head of the main body of the 2d Infantry Division of the Guard so as to take an active part in the battle at the earliest possible moment. The mountainous country north of the Chiers made it obvious that the Cavalry Division would have no opportunity to-day of independent action. Orders were therefore issued to the horse batteries to rejoin for this day the Corps Artillery, which was thus increased to seven batteries.

The higher we ascended in pursuing our way to Francheval, the more we escaped the mist in the valley, and when the latter was somewhat dissipated after sunrise, we discovered the long columns of the XII. Corps which covered the high road from Douzy to Lamécourt. The troops of the Guard Corps had probably to cover a greater distance to reach the enemy than those of the XII. Corps, for the patrols sent out in the early morning reported that the hostile cavalry had left their camp at Villers-Cernay, in which they had been observed on the previous evening. No time therefore must be lost if the Guard Corps was to attack in line with the XII. Corps. The troops were ordered to push on quickly. From the height northwest of Francheval, we could see in the direction of Villers-Cernay, that above the village of Rubécourt the valley of the Rulle stream could be crossed by large bodies of troops only at Villers-Cernay. Hence all the troops, including those directed on Francheval, were ordered to move on this point where the advance guard of the

1st Infantry Division of the Guard crossed at 8 a.m. The whole corps had to cross on this one bridge. It caused some loss of time, but not so much as you might suppose, for the length of the columns had been greatly diminished by losses. The infantry of the whole Corps numbered only as many combatants as the war strength of the smallest division. The artillery and cavalry were able to pass the defile at a rapid pace. The advance guard of the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard cleared the wood on the height between Villers-Cernay and Givonne of two hostile companies, so that the artillery of the 1st Division and the Corps Artillery might deploy in front and on each side of it and engage the hostile batteries beyond Givonne, which were already pressing hard on the XII. Corps. Fire was opened at 8.45 a.m.

During an artillery duel of two hours, in which our artillery became more and more superior, the advance guard of the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard took Givonne; the main bodies of both Infantry Divisions deployed in rear of the wood, the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard to the left in the direction of Haybes, because the XII. Corps had sent word that it would extend as far as Daigny. Soon after the opening of the battle, the Guard Corps received orders from the army commander (dated 8 a.m.) to move in the direction of Fleigneux, the XII. Corps to Illy. Before executing this order we had to overpower the enemy in front, who was making energetic counter-strokes against us, more particularly against the XII. Corps. The enemy's artillery was gradually subdued, movements to the rear became visible, and a large mass of cavalry commenced to move northwards from Illy to seek protection from our fire in the Ardennes near the Belgian frontier. In rear of the hostile troops we discovered with good telescopes an ever increasing line of guns on the heights of St. Menges 5 miles away; they fired in our direction, but as their shells did not reach us, the latter must have been directed on the

French visible between us. There could be no doubt about it, they were troops of the Third Army which had crossed the Meuse at Donchéry during the night! The corps commander was entreated to drive the attack home and advance the artillery to decisive range in order to relieve the pressure on those troops; for there seemed to be no doubt that the enemy was leaving us alone only to throw his whole force on them. But at this time the enemy attacked the right of the XII. Corps so vehemently through Daigny, that it became very desirable to lend our assistance there first. The Prince of Wurttemberg therefore resisted all entreaties to bring the conflict with the enemy in front to a decision for the present, and despatched the 2nd Infantry Division of the Guard against the left flank of the enemy, who had advanced against the Saxons and crossed the Givonne stream at Daigny. It was only when this enemy had been thrown back across the valley, that the artillery were allowed to be advanced to prepare the decision.

Soon after 12 o'clock the batteries advanced and opened fire from 90 guns at very short range, making it impossible to the enemy to remain on the further edge of the Givonne valley. Under cover of this fire, united on the left to that of the Saxon guns, single deployed companies crossed the valley and occupied the further edge. The enemy made another desperate attack. Dense masses advanced rapidly (the left wing of Wimpffen's attempt to break through). The rapid fire from our batteries tore terrible gaps through the lines; they then dispersed and were shot down by our skirmishers. The resistance of the enemy in front seemed broken. A long line of artillery was deployed in the country beyond Illy. It did not fire on us, however,¹ but on the French. It was formed by the batteries of the XI. and V. Corps.

It now was time to proceed to the infantry attack. At

¹ I was told afterwards that they were about to open fire on us when a staff officer discovered the mistake.

3 p.m. the advance guard of the 1st Infantry Division of the Guard penetrated into the Bois de la Garenne almost without fighting, overcame what little resistance was encountered in the interior, collected many thousands of prisoners, and soon met troops from the V., XI. and XII. Corps. An hour before sundown the commander of the Meuse Army issued an order to unite all the guns that could find room, for the bombardment of the fortress of Sedan to which the remnant of the hostile army were retreating; the order was rescinded by direction of the King, who ordered the firing to cease as Napoleon had tendered his sword. The battle had been decided.

Hardly ever have so many questions of a strategical nature presented themselves in one day to a corps fighting as part of an army, as to the Guard Corps in the battle of Sedan, if we, like Clausewitz, call those questions strategical which refer to the general use of troops for the object of battle.

In the first place the Guard Corps hastened its march to the utmost because immediate action was necessary to relieve the pressure on the other corps as far as possible. We heard the noise of battle from the Bavarians while we were still on the march. We saw the XII. Corps approach them whilst we were still far from the enemy. The XII. Corps was a good 3 miles nearer to the enemy from the first, and therefore received its orders to assemble and its instructions much sooner. At the same time the army during its advance wheeled half left, the Guard Corps being on the outer flank. Hardly ever have troops marched so hurriedly as those of the Guard Corps on the 1st September, 1870. But that was not all. In order to emphasize the attack as soon and as much as possible, the corps artillery was ordered to the head of the column whilst still on the march.

Soon after the opening of the battle the second strategical question had to be decided. Orders were sent by

the Army Commander from his position between Ambli-mont and Mairy for the Guard Corps to march along the Givonne valley to Fleigneux and the XII. Corps in the direction of Illy. At the time when the order arrived, it was capable of being executed, but the General Commanding recognized that to do so would be combined with considerable danger, since the XII. Corps had become seriously engaged without at first making progress. The Guard Corps had therefore to defeat the enemy in front of it, before carrying out the order, though by moving in the direction of the Bois de la Garenne it not only diverged considerably from Fleigneux, but also crossed the line of advance of the XII. Corps to Illy. After the commander of the Meuse Army had changed his position to the height east of Daigny during the battle, he saw how matters stood and did not insist on the execution of the order.

The third and most difficult question had to be decided when the appearance of German troops on the Calvaire d'Illy in rear of the French line of battle was observed, and at the same time a request was received to outflank the enemy, who was pushing the XII. Corps rather close. The General Commanding reflected that the chief strategical task for the Meuse Army, which must be kept in view by the Corps, was to bar the enemy's road to the east, and that it was of secondary importance to contain as many of the enemy's forces as possible by an energetic offensive and thus divert him from the movement on Mézières. He therefore decided to first attack the flank of the enemy, who had crossed the Givonne at Daigny, and then to seek decision by an attack on the Bois de la Garenne. The corps was not strong enough to undertake both tasks at the same time. I must confess I felt very unhappy about this delay, because, from my point of view, in the line of guns I only had before my eyes the situation in which the German troops at St. Menges must be, and because I saw nothing of the enemy's progress at Daigny.

Now I concur most fully with the view of the Corps Commander who received reports from all sides.

While proceeding to the decisive attack on the Bois de la Garenne, the latter despatched the Cavalry Division up the Givonne valley to Fleigneux to prevent the enemy from escaping to Belgium and to connect the right of his own line with the left of the Germans who had come through the defile of St. Albert and thus solved the fourth strategical problem of the day, the final surrounding of the whole hostile army.

I have now only to recapitulate briefly the movements of the other portions of the German Armies and the strategical measures that were ordered.

The battle was opened by General v. d. Tann with the I. Bavarian Corps. He had been instructed to hold the enemy in his front and told that he was at liberty to proceed to the attack before the appearance of the Meuse Army. Of this permission he made the fullest use, having correctly gauged the strategical situation that the earlier he attacked the enemy, the more of the latter's forces would he be able to hold, since they would not have time to retire to the west. Hence he granted but little rest to the French, with whom he had been fighting up to noon on the 31st August. He crossed the Meuse by the bridges at 3 a.m. under cover of the darkness and entered Bazeilles from two sides. The conflict rolled to and fro in this scattered village, because more and more troops were brought up from both sides, more particularly by the Bavarian Corps, which had received a report at 4 a.m. that the Meuse Army would move not later than 5 a.m. When about 6 a.m. the mist had so far disappeared that the artillery could take part in the conflict, the advance guard of the XII. Corps soon took up the struggle by the side of the Bavarian Corps, and the remaining parts of the former Corps came into action one after the other during the next two hours.

The progress made at first in the struggle for Bazeilles and observed by the commander of the Meuse Army from his position on the height between Amblimont and Mairy led the latter to believe that he had only to deal with a French rear guard covering the retreat of the French Army and intent on opposing the Meuse Army as long as possible. He naturally assumed that the enemy would do what was most advantageous, and that was a hasty retreat to Mézières under cover of a masking force sent in advance to Donchéry. The enemy's movements to the west which had been observed on the preceding day, confirmed this view.

The orders issued at 8 a.m., with which we are already acquainted, directing the XII. Corps to move on Illy, and the Guard Corps on Fleigneux, were therefore perfectly justified, the object being to overtake as many of the hostile forces as possible, and to hold them fast by a simultaneous attack, thus cutting them off from the Belgian frontier. The three corps (I. Bavarian, XII. and Guard) encountered in the valley of the Givonne the least shaken troops of the enemy (12th and 1st Corps) which made several resolute attacks, and fought a frontal battle until their resistance was completely broken down at 3 p.m. Meanwhile, one division of the IV. Corps was forming up in reserve at Lamécourt, the other at Bazeilles. Both took part in the struggle at various times. One Division of the II. Bavarian Corps was also employed in support of the I. Bavarian Corps, and brought about the final decision by an attack on the enemy's right flank at Bazeilles.

Early in the morning (at 7.30 a.m.) the King had taken his position on the height south of Frénois, the Commanders of the Meuse and Third Armies to the south of Donchéry at 6 a.m. Both points offered a good view of the whole country to the north of the Meuse; Bazeilles alone, from which the sound of the guns resounded with ever-increasing vigour, was hidden from view by intervening hills. At

7 a.m. the mist disappeared entirely. It could then be seen that one Bavarian division posted between Wadelincourt and Frenois would suffice to shut in the fortress from the south. The troops could be seen crossing at Donchéry and Dom-le-Mesnil, and it was also observed that the cavalry patrols thrown far out in front on the road Sedan-Mezières were *not* fired on at Vrigneaux-Bois. This proved that the enemy had not yet commenced their retreat to Mezières. The only cause of disquietude to the Third Army was therefore the sound of battle rising from Bazeilles. Although a communication had been received from the Meuse Army at 4 a.m. detailing the steps taken by the latter, and it was thus known that the I. Bavarian Corps was well supported, still it was not impossible that the enemy might have suddenly resumed the offensive towards the east, and that the Meuse Army was engaged with the whole French army. The commander of the Third Army therefore supported the troops engaged in two ways. The direction of the approaching II. Bavarian Corps was changed so that the division, originally ordered to the position Frénois-Wadelincourt, was directed to Bazeilles to support the I. Corps, while the left column with the corps artillery, originally ordered to the heights of Donchéry, was ordered to the position Frénois-Wadelincourt. More powerful, however, was the indirect support afforded by the Third Army in despatching orders at 7.30 a.m. to the two corps which had crossed at Donchéry, to advance eastward through the defile of St. Albert, and take the enemy in rear, no matter whether the latter had remained in position or taken up the offensive against the Meuse Army. Thus did the two Army Commanders vie with each other on this day to draw on themselves as many of the enemy as possible, each in order to take the pressure from the other.

The further course of the battle, the measures taken by the Royal Headquarters and the Commanders of the

Armies for the purpose of forcing the French Army close together, are of a purely tactical character, and have no place in our discussion.

A few of the direct measures of the Supreme Command may perhaps be called strategical. We see in the first place that the Wurttemberg Division was thrown out toward Mezières to oppose any effort Vinoy might make. One division thus paralyzed a whole army corps of the enemy, illustrating the rule of uniting the main forces for decisive action, and detaching as few as possible for secondary purposes.

A tactical order was issued by the Supreme Command which was in so far strategical as it hastened the end of the resistance on the part of the French Army. The troops which barred the southern issues from Sedan (4th Bavarian Division and Corps Artillery of the II. Bavarian Corps) had remained almost entirely inactive during the greater part of the battle. Even the artillery of these troops had been directed to husband their ammunition, or only to sustain a slow fire in case the enemy attempted to escape to the south. In the course of the afternoon the Supreme Command near Frénois observed that the whole country north of Sedan had been brought under a concentric fire, and that large bodies of the enemy were seeking shelter in the fortress from the German shells. The King directed at 4 p.m. that the fire of all the guns on the left bank of the Meuse should be directed against the fortress, and thus prevent further losses by hastening the capitulation. Conflagrations soon broke out in several places of the town, which was filled with troops. The enemy hoisted the white flag, and the battle was decided.

In turning now to the strategical measures of the French Commander-in-Chief during the battle, we must remember that the Marshal was wounded and placed *hors de combat* at 6 a.m. before he had adopted a definite plan.

For the second time in this campaign the misfortune of the French Army was increased by an unfortunate change of commanders taking place at the critical moment, causing loss of time. The corps commanders could not be informed of the intentions of the Commander-in-Chief before the latter had arrived at a decision. They could only await the enemy's attack, make as stout a defence as possible, and maintain their positions. None of them could for the present take the offensive in various directions, until it was known whether the remainder would follow in the same direction. The 12th Corps fought for the possession of Bazeilles with the utmost determination and bravery.

The wounded Marshal handed the command of the Army over to General Ducrot commanding the 1st Corps, passing over Wimpffen and Douay, who were the seniors, believing that Ducrot was better acquainted with the Marshal's intentions than himself. Wimpffen at first offered no protest, although he had in his possession the secret order of the Minister of War at Paris to assume the command in such an emergency. But Ducrot was ignorant of the Marshal's intentions, he did not even know that the Germans had crossed the Meuse at Donchéry. According to Wimpffen's statement the whole staff of the Marshal accompanied him from the battle-field to Sedan. Ducrot, in his position on the left of the 12th Corps on the line of the Givonne, knew of nothing but the struggle for Bazeilles and the approach of hostile forces from the direction of Pouru-aux-Bois, Pouru St. Rémy and Douzy. It is more than natural that he should believe that the whole hostile army was advancing to the attack from the east and south-east. Believing that the retreat to Mézières was open, he ordered as a preliminary measure those divisions of the 12th and 1st Corps which were in second line to begin the retreat to the north-west, and the troops engaged at and near Bazeilles to follow later as a rear guard. Lacretelle's Division of the

12th Corps with the intact units of Vassoignes' Division, which was engaged in the struggle for Bazeilles, advanced to the attack north of Bazeilles, beyond La Moncelle in an easterly direction to cover this retreat. Ducrot had thrown out Lartigue's Division of the 1st Corps to the east of this place to cover the passage at Daigny. It is a question of tactics, not of strategy, whether such an offensive beyond a strong defile is correct for troops which are merely to act as a rear guard and cover the retreat. I merely state the fact that part of the two corps (12th and 1st) took up the offensive, and another part began to retreat. Ducrot intended to leave Lartigue's Division if necessary on the left bank of the Givonne, and to sacrifice it in order to cover the retreat to Mézières.

On the receipt of these orders Wimpffen claimed and received the command by virtue of his secret order. Wimpffen knew that German troops had crossed at Donchéry, and therefore considered a retreat on Mézières impracticable. He had thus a better idea of the actual situation than Ducrot, and recognized that the only chance of safety lay in an offensive movement to the east in order to join Bazaine by force. He considered the latter movement possible, and now felt bound to make use of his secret order to carry out the plans of the Ministry, and at the same time to save the army. He halted the troops which had commenced the retreat, and moved them towards the east. This resulted in the energetic offensive at 9 a.m., which for some time pushed hard the left wing of the German XII. Corps, while the defence of the line of the Givonne had slackened just before. The Meuse Army, with the assistance of successive reinforcements, threw the assailants back into the valley of the Givonne, whilst Wimpffen, who in the beginning had mistaken the German attacks from the west for feints, and was now disquieted by the increasing cannonade from that direction, had learnt the state of affairs at that point, and recognized that General Douay on the Calvaire

d'Illy and at the Bois de la Garenne was in need of support against the west. He therefore ordered that all troops of the 1st Corps that could be spared should be directed there. The troops were thus moved in a different direction for the third time. Wimpffen then hastened back to Bazeilles, and found the troops of the 12th Corps in full retreat to Sedan and Fond de Givonne at noon. He now ordered Douay to send all available troops to Bazeilles.

Douay's forces, thus diminished, were after this literally torn in pieces by the fire of the ever increasing number of guns, placed in a semi-circle enveloping the position. The troops of the French 1st Corps which were marching towards Douay, and those which Douay had been ordered to send to Bazeilles, met in the Bois de la Garenne, and were shelled here by the batteries of the Guard. The most terrible confusion must have resulted.

Now followed two desperate attacks. One made by the cavalry, toward the west, was dashed to pieces against the German infantry. In spite of the utmost bravery, Wimpffen decided to make the second attack at 1 p.m., after being convinced at Bazeilles that he could not maintain his position round Sedan much longer. He meant to force the Bavarians, whom he thought were exhausted, back to the Meuse, and open for himself a way to Carignan. The 12th Corps and the available remnant of the 5th Corps were directed against Bazeilles, the 1st Corps was to attack La Moncelle and Bazeilles from the north, and the 7th Corps was to cover this movement. But he no longer based his calculations on actual facts. The greater part of these troops was at that time no more able to beat off the enemy than they were able to take the offensive in another direction. He also miscalculated the time necessary for such a movement by a whole army. Douay (7th Corps) received the order at 2 p.m., Ducrot (1st) at 3 p.m., after he had led the *débris* of his corps

back to Sedan ; Lebrun (12th Corps) did not receive the order at all. All that Wimpffen himself was able to collect for his attempt to cut his way out, were the remains of Vassoigne's Division (about 5000 or 6000 men), Goze's Division, Abatucci's brigade of the 5th Corps, and Grandchamp's Division of the 12th Corps. These three and a half weak and partly defeated divisions, though they fought with desperate valour, could only expect defeat from the three corps of the victorious Meuse Army, reinforced by one and a half Bavarian corps. While the defeated troops were pouring back into the fortress of Sedan, hostile shells were causing conflagrations in this last place of refuge, the white flag was displayed, and the catastrophe was complete.

I shall now proceed to deduce certain strategical lessons from the events of this battle and from the orders issued by the French commanders, in spite of the fact that I have already stated that no matter what efforts they might have made, the fate of the French Army was decided on the 1st September before a shot had been fired. It would be a mere waste of time to attempt to discover what they ought to have done, but the many minor events which hastened the final catastrophe are well worthy of consideration.

First of all MacMahon's wound caused a change in the Supreme Command ; time was lost, and the consequent indecision had a bad effect on the movement of the army. What caused the Marshal to place himself in the foremost line of the fighting troops so early in the battle ? The commander of an army ought to be in the centre, where he is equally near to all points of the line, and where all the reports can reach him at the same time. If he proceeds to the firing line he can only receive the impression of a small part of the events, and remains so removed from the others as to easily gain wrong ideas and lose sight of the whole. The effect of his presence on the troops—excepting at critical moments—is very small, for

as a rule it does not extend farther than a company or a battalion. MacMahon rode to Bazeilles, and thence to the height near La Moncelle. The commander-in-chief should move about as little as possible, in order that the reports of the subordinate commanders may be able to reach him at once. V. d. Goltz has worked out in detail in his excellent work, "The Nation in Arms," the reasons why the commander-in-chief should, as a rule, keep away from the minor impressions of the events, so as to be able to keep the whole in view. You can read in the Official Account how the Supreme Command of our army took up its position on the height of Frénois, and remained there during the battle of Sedan, and the commander of the Third Army on the height south of Donchéry. Only the commander of the Meuse Army, who had at first proceeded to the heights between Amblimont and Mairy, had to follow the line of battle as it advanced to avoid delay in receiving reports and issuing orders, and then remained on the height of Daigny about the centre of the line of battle. It is only at critical moments, when the reserves are brought up at the decisive point, that the commander-in-chief finds his best place in the midst of the fighting line. You may read that at such a moment the King rode into the foremost ranks of the combatants at Königgrätz, as well as at Gravelotte. When Wimpffen made the desperate attempt towards the end of the battle to cut his way out, his place would have been in the midst of the troops who were to execute this movement. Such situations, however, did not exist before 6 a.m. on the morning of the 1st September either at Bazeilles or La Moncelle. MacMahon's position was certainly not in the fighting line, as he was uneasy about his line of communications, on account of the passage of German troops at Donchéry, which is shown by his sending two staff officers there, and he had to direct his attention as much in the opposite direction as to Bazeilles. MacMahon was too experienced

a leader not to know where his place was. The cool steadiness with which he waited at Magenta for the deployment of his forces before proceeding to the attack which the Emperor repeatedly and urgently requested him to, shows that he was not given to precipitate action. He was also well known by his troops, and did not need to show them that he was not afraid to share the dangers of battle with them. What caused him to ride there before daybreak when the noise of battle from the direction of Bazeilles was first heard? I hinted once before that he considered the situation of the army so desperate and hopeless, that, conscious of having been forced into this position against his better judgment by the ill-advised Regency, he preferred to seek death on the battle-field, and thus close his famous career, rather than survive the destruction of his Army. Should I have guessed his motives, criticism must be silent, since his action must then be considered as proceeding from a sense of honour, and not from strategy.

The wounded Marshal appointed General Ducrot as his successor, passing over Wimpffen and Douay. The fact that Ducrot first took command, and Wimpffen only made use later on of the secret order given him by the Minister of War, again caused loss of time and counter-orders, for Wimpffen's plan was directly the opposite of Ducrot's. This is absolutely unintelligible to us Prussians, for in our army if a commander fall, whatever his rank, the next senior takes his place provisionally until the proper authority makes a permanent appointment. No other authority but the sovereign is competent to appoint the commander-in-chief of an army. The French regulations cannot have been very different. The Emperor at first personally exercised the command over the whole army, later on he appointed Marshal Bazaine Commander-in-Chief. Subsequently he handed the command of the Army of Châlons over to MacMahon, with this limitation, that he was to be governed by Bazaine's instructions. Never-

theless, the Marshal appointed his successor, whilst at the same time Wimpffen was present with his secret appointment by the Minister of War in Paris. What right had MacMahon to appoint his successor? What right had the Minister of War in Paris to appoint General Wimpffen the eventual Commander-in-Chief?

It would have been different if the Emperor had been wounded, captured, or prevented by other causes from expressing his will. He was present, however, and not more than 3 miles away. What is still worse, he submitted to this interference with his exclusive rights, and acquiesced in silence, like a disinterested spectator. How the authority of this Emperor must have been undermined, whose New Year greetings once shook the world, since Palikao, MacMahon and Wimpffen dared to do such things! How the will-power of this once so formidable monarch must have decreased, since he submitted without protest! His celebrated "Système de balance" was an egregious fiasco. In a well ordered State things may run on for a considerable space of time without detriment, in times of peace and quiet, notwithstanding that the authority of the monarch may be undermined. Such conditions, however, attack the supports of the State as rust attacks iron and as dry-rot destroys timber. In critical times the rotten structure of the State collapses like a frail house in an earthquake.

What are we to learn from this sad experience? We, who never doubt the absolute authority of our Supreme Commander, see in this simply a confirmation of the foundations of our military system. There are men, however, particularly in civilian and political circles, who would carry the logical sequence of constitutional and parliamentary principles so far that the head of the State would lose all authority, and that all power would be vested in responsible Ministers. The latter should be warned in time by the latter reign of Napoleon III., and should clearly see the misfortunes that will befall the

whole country when the authority of the sovereign is sapped.

But these reflections are outside strategy.

Ducrot assumed the Supreme Command at 6 a.m., but there was no one to inform him of the state of affairs. The whole staff of the wounded Marshal is said to have accompanied the latter to Sedan. If this was the case, an officer accustomed to our system is at a loss what to say. For the staff of a commander, of any rank, is not personal, but must continue in the performance of its duties, though the command may change hands. Only the personal aide-de-camp of the Marshal should have remained with him. He had only one, so far as I know; in fact, I think I made his acquaintance. All the other staff officers should have reported themselves to Ducrot. The latter would thus have learned at once that the communications with Mézières *via* Vrigne-aux-Bois were threatened. In that case, if he nevertheless decided to attempt to retreat to Mézières, he would at once have sent orders to General Douay to march immediately, and to at least keep the defile of St. Albert open. The latter would then probably have encountered the points of the German troops which had crossed at Donchéry in the defile. The Official Account does not mention any order sent by Ducrot to Douay. If Ducrot was ignorant of the danger threatening Vrigne-aux-Bois, he was justified in believing the retreat to Mézières practicable, and it was moreover the only sensible plan he could adopt in view of the hostile masses engaged at Bazeilles, as well as those which he saw approaching from Douzy, and those reported to be approaching from Carignan. I cannot quite understand, however, why he weakened those troops first which were to form the rear guard to oppose the advancing enemy, and why the divisions of the 1st and 12th Corps in the second line were ordered to begin the retreat. These troops, in carrying out the retreat, had to march through those of the 5th and 7th Corps, and thus

caused confusion and disorder. I think he should have sent orders to the 5th and 7th Corps to commence at once the retreat on Mézières, and to the 1st and 12th Corps to hold the line of the Givonne. After the 5th and 7th Corps had retreated so far that there was no longer any necessity to hold the line of the Givonne (which could not have happened before the evening of the 1st September) he might then have begun to successively withdraw the defenders of this line, assuming that they would have been able to hold it so long. That is my idea, based on what I now know of the whole situation. It is questionable, however, whether Ducrot knew the position of the 5th and 7th Corps. The staff of the Marshal had ridden away, and could not assist him. Hence you must abstain from any definite criticism of the measures he ordered.

As soon as the retrograde movements ordered by Ducrot had been commenced, Wimpffen made use of his secret order and assumed command. His first measure was to countermand Ducrot's orders and to send the troops back to their former positions. He meant to let the attackers (the Meuse Army and the Bavarians) dash themselves against the position on the Givonne, and then to take the offensive and cut his way out to Carignan. Wimpffen then rode to Douay, because the increasing cannonade rendered him anxious as to the state of affairs in the west. He there became convinced of the urgent necessity of support, and ordered the 1st Corps to send all available troops to help him. The Divisions of Pellé and L'Hériller, which had once before moved to the rear and had been recalled to the Givonne, were thus sent to the west again. Immediately afterwards Wimpffen rode to Bazeilles, where he found the troops in full retreat, and he now ordered Douay to despatch all available troops to Bazeilles. Thus he rode here and there in a state of nervous excitement and ordered troops to be despatched to whatever point he happened to be at; whole divisions were kept marching to and fro

(those of Pellé and L'Hériller) without coming into action, until they crossed other troops and all were thrown into disorder, offering a favourable target to the enemy's guns. Nothing could prove more clearly than this mobility of Wimpffen which was so harmful to the French Army that the commander-in-chief of an army should occupy a central position and leave it only in case of urgent necessity, and that as a rule he should not enter the foremost line of battle. But Wimpffen also must not be criticized too severely. However much I might try to imagine myself in his position, I am unable to do so. For to us it seems impossible that a man should arrive at Paris from Algiers, receive there during a stay of a few hours the command of the 5th Corps, thus superseding the Emperor's favourite general and aide-de-camp, and join the Emperor with a secret order in his pocket conferring, in a certain emergency, the Supreme Command on him without reference to the Emperor. To judge all this correctly, one ought to have witnessed the general unsettled state and subversion of all authority in Paris and in the surroundings of the Emperor at that time. Wimpffen certainly joined the Army with the best of intentions. We cannot but assume that he had made the War Minister's impracticable plan of forcing the junction with Bazaine's army, completely his own; otherwise that Minister would not have sent him with such full powers. But according to the Minister's conception, as we know, MacMahon had a considerable start of the Crown Prince of Prussia and was opposed merely by a fraction of the army investing Metz. Imbued with this conception Wimpffen arrived at Sedan. The long journey thither from Algiers by way of Paris in such critical times and with such instructions, is in itself sufficient to excite the calmest temperament. Add to the obstacles he encountered on the road, and the necessity of covering the distance from Rethel to Mézières on horseback, the fact that in the darkness he was ridden down by his own hussars. Wimpffen mounted his horse

at Bazeilles and the first thing he saw was his corps in headlong flight! No one can describe the confusion more drastically than he does in his own book. His actions as described by himself, betray his excitement. He addresses individuals and attempts to stop them. If a corps commander spends his time and energy in this manner, his sphere of action will not exceed that of a company commander. He collected fugitives of three different corps and posted them at Mairy without knowing whether that position would ever be useful, since he knew nothing of the situation of the army (see Wimpffen's "Sedan," p. 131). There he received orders at 9 p.m. to retire to Sedan. He reached the fortress at 1 a.m. on the 31st August. His servant, his horses, his personal effects fell into the hands of the enemy. At Sedan he found no rest in his scanty quarters; he went in search of his troops at 6 a.m., met the Marshal at 9 a.m., and requested that the command of the corps might be formally handed over to him. This was not done until the afternoon. Meanwhile Wimpffen sought to make himself acquainted with his corps. In the afternoon he had a conversation with the Emperor. In the evening he returned to his corps and passed the night in the open, without a cloak or a tent. The Marshal gave him no information about his plans. Wimpffen himself heard of the preparations of the Germans to cross the river at Donch ry, and estimated their strength at 80,000. His conception of the situation of the army is characterized by his statement, that the enemy's attack at Bazeilles could only be a feint, and by the opinion, which he held even at the time he wrote his book, that the Crown Prince of "SAXONY" (!) had crossed the Meuse at Donch ry on the evening of the 31st August to cut off the French retreat to M zi res. He was therefore convinced that he had only the army of the Crown Prince of Saxony to deal with, whose main forces were crossing the Meuse at Donch ry, and that a comparatively small force was attacking Bazeilles from the east. The retreat to M zi res

would therefore appear impracticable to him, while on the other hand he considered it an easy matter to crush the enemy attacking Bazeilles and march to Metz. When I imagine him fully imbued with these ideas I can easily understand his excitement on hearing that Ducrot, on taking command, had commenced the retreat on Mézières. He now felt it to be his duty to assume the Supreme Command by virtue of the secret order, because in his opinion it was the only means of saving the Army. He therefore countermanded the movement which he was convinced would lead the Army to destruction. He lacked all executive means for issuing his orders, for the Marshal's staff had accompanied the latter from the battle-field. I can imagine the desperate frame of mind in which this placed him. But it was not correct for him to gallop everywhere in person and arrange everything himself, for that is not the way of commanding an army of 150,000 to 200,000 men. Not even a battalion with four companies in extended order can be commanded like that in action. Still after all he had gone through, this action of Wimpffen is only human and can be explained and excused.

As regards the attempt which Wimpffen made towards the end of the battle to cut his way out to Carignan, I have explained above why it was tactically impossible. Although Wimpffen may have adhered to the idea that the main forces of the Crown Prince of Saxony were between Mézières and Sedan and that the Bavarians at Bazeilles were simply making a feigned attack, yet the number of guns which, about 1 p.m., spread death and destruction among his troops from the east and south-east, should have convinced him that at least four German corps were engaged. This attempt to cut his way out could be of no strategical value at all. Even had he reached Carignan with the remnant of his brave troops, what could he then do without transport, provisions, artillery, or ammunition, except fall into the hands of the pursuing Germans? Yet I cannot find fault with this last despairing effort. Otherwise

I should have to find fault with the French Army for fighting at all on the 1st September, instead of capitulating earlier. A nation which is not prepared to stake everything for the sake of its honour is not worthy to exist. And what is to become of a nation if not even its army is willing to fight for its honour, though the struggle be hopeless? Our commanders who were present on the spot willingly acknowledged that the French soldiers, though their enemies, fought for their honour at Sedan with the utmost devotion and bravery.

Permit me to add one word more on the strategical and tactical value of the fortress of Sedan in this catastrophe. If you wish to have a clear idea on this point, you must calculate the probable course of events had Sedan not been a fortress. In this case the French Army, after its defeat at Beaumont, would have begun its retreat due north from the line Stonne-Beaumont on the evening of the 30th and during the 31st August, following the natural law by which defeated troops retire straight to the rear. The French leaders on their part would have endeavoured to place the river-line Chiers-Meuse between themselves and the enemy, and then reorganize their army. There would have been no reason to crowd the whole together at Sedan. On the contrary, it would have been natural for leaders as well as soldiers to take that direction whence supports by fresh troops might be expected, and that was the direction of Mézières. Douay's divisions, which were cut off by the collapse of the bridge at Remilly, would have endeavoured to gain the left bank of the Meuse by Donchéry, for he could not have received orders as to the direction of the retreat on the evening of the 30th August. According to Wimpffen these were not issued until 9 p.m., by which time the bridge no longer existed. The magnetic attraction which the term "fortress" exercises in war on all those who are in need of support and protec-

tion, drew all individual fugitives, soldiers as well as their leaders, towards Sedan.

If Sedan had not been a fortress, it would not have occurred to any of the French leaders to halt behind it, and front towards the south, with their rear barely 3 miles from the almost impassable, wooded and mountainous Belgian frontier, with a victorious enemy in their front. No leader would have cared whether the troops could march further, but all would have been agreed that they *must* march further, at any cost. The circumstance that Sedan, with its fortifications, and the inundation of the Meuse, afforded temporary protection from immediate contact with the enemy, gave rise to the idea of utilising it for the purpose of re-forming and provisioning the troops.

You may, perhaps, say that the fortress afforded at least tactical protection towards the south. On the 31st August—nay, on the 1st September—this protection was of very dubious value. On the 31st August the Army was not yet in need of this protection, for on that day the German armies could not think of changing the direct pursuit to a decisive attack beyond the line of the Chiers-Meuse. The sole event of this day would have been the advance guard engagement of the I. Bavarian Corps at Bazeilles, had Sedan not been a fortress. It is true that its works and the inundation prevented the German troops at first from making a direct attack from the south on the 1st September. But, on the other hand, they afforded the Germans a certain amount of protection, for comparatively insignificant forces sufficed to prevent any movement to the south by the French Army. Only a small number of troops could issue from the three outlets of the bridge-head of Sedan under the fire of the batteries of one division and the Corps Artillery of the II. Bavarian Corps posted on the heights of Frénois. Had the works of Sedan not existed on the 1st September, and the movement of the French Army to the south been unimpeded, the German Supreme Com-

mand would have been obliged to post a considerably greater force on the line Frénois-Wadelincourt. The German forces might have been so weakened that they could not have risked an attack from all sides, and would have been restricted to attacking simultaneously from the south and east, or from the south and west, and thus have allowed the French Army to retreat either to the west or to the east.

The existence of Sedan as a fortress was an actual danger to the Army of Châlons, both strategically and tactically. This certainly seems a very paradoxical opinion on the value of fortifications, though nothing is further from my thoughts than to deny the value of all such works.

THIRTY-THIRD LETTER.

COMMENTS.

IF you will look through the second part of Bronsart's work, "The Duties of the General Staff," you will find that I have touched upon and discussed, by means of practical examples, almost everything relating to strategy. I hope that I have fulfilled your wish, that I should not only discuss the general principles of strategy, but also deduce those lessons from the facts which could be applied to the details of execution; that is, the technical part of strategy.

We discussed very fully in Part I. the organization of an army in army corps, and the number of the component parts of an army. I did not mention the case of an army composed of fractions smaller than a corps. Not only in small countries like Servia and Switzerland have divisions been placed under the direct orders of an army without an intermediate corps commander. The army of Prince Frederick Charles in 1866 consisted of divisions which received their orders directly from him, and also of army corps divided into divisions. In 1870 we witnessed the formation of an army detachment (under the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg), which consisted of one army corps, and two infantry and four cavalry divisions under the direct orders of the army commander.

It has been exceptional with us, however, for the infantry divisions to be directly under the orders of the army commander. As soon as an army reaches a cer-

tain strength, the necessity is felt for the intermediate authority of the corps commander, because otherwise the fractions with which the army headquarters communicates directly become too numerous, and the timely transmission of orders is rendered doubtful. For these reasons our infantry divisions have as matters of principle never been placed directly under the army commander, but only exceptionally and temporarily, when local or personal reasons rendered it desirable, just as such considerations sometimes cause the number of corps in an army to be increased or diminished.

On the other hand I have frequently discussed the necessity of independent cavalry divisions. I have not yet discussed the strength of the cavalry divisions and their subdivision into brigades. That question is really of a tactical nature, but is also interesting to the strategist, as it is important for him to know with what units he has to deal. In the war of 1870 we had divisions of 2 or 3 brigades, and brigades of 2 or 3 regiments; the regiment invariably consisted of 4 squadrons. We had cavalry divisions of 16, 20, 24, and even 36 squadrons. At present our cavalry divisions consist as a rule of 3 brigades of 2 regiments each—24 squadrons altogether. I am inclined to believe, however, that in case of war there will be many deviations from this rule. There is great difference of opinion among cavalry leaders as to whether it would be better to have brigades of 2 or 3 regiments.

I have also touched very lightly on the division of an army corps into infantry divisions, although the French army corps consisted of three, and even four, the German corps of only two. The possibility of rapidly transmitting orders is one of the chief factors in deciding the number of divisions in a corps, and for this reason it is endeavoured to limit the number of subordinate authorities with which the corps headquarters have direct communication. The Guard Corps

had 5 such units, viz. 2 infantry divisions, 1 cavalry division, the corps artillery, and the transport and supply columns, to which in most cases the ammunition columns have to be added ; for although the latter were under the command of the corps artillery, still the corps headquarters had frequently to issue direct orders to them when time was pressing, because they were generally at some distance. I admit that the commander of an army corps, with no cavalry division under his orders, can easily command three infantry divisions. You must remember, however, that the larger the corps, the more clumsy it is, and that a small corps is handier and easier to move. Napoleon I. frequently made the strength of the corps dependent on the confidence he placed in his subordinates. Davout's corps was almost invariably the strongest (frequently 50,000 men). I believe that we shall adhere to our present formation of two infantry divisions to a corps, because the strength of our corps is in proportion to the political division of the country into provinces, where in time of war acting corps commanders attend to the more peaceable business of the corps. By adhering to the existing state of things the transition from the peace to the war footing and also the course of routine business is best promoted. Still the case is not inconceivable, that if it be necessary to form armies of unusual strength, three divisions may sometimes be united in one corps in order not to have an excessive number of corps in one army.

The infantry division is in a certain sense a strategical unit, as we call the battalion, the squadron, the battery, tactical units. The strength (12-13 battalions) of the infantry division was the same in both of the opposing armies, so that we may consider the normal division to consist of two brigades of two regiments. The artillery attached to our divisions consisted of four batteries of 6 guns, those of the French of three batteries of 6 guns (including one battery of mitrailleuses). A French officer

once told me that he had suggested to the Emperor Napoleon III. to give the infantry divisions more artillery. The Emperor replied that they had too much, because the commanders of infantry divisions did not know how to use their guns. Such a disadvantage did not exist in the German Army; on the contrary, we felt the necessity for giving the infantry divisions more artillery, and I think this will be realized practically in the next war.¹

I am not aware whether the same reason prevented the Emperor Napoleon from attaching cavalry to the infantry organizations, and caused him to unite the cavalry belonging to each corps in a cavalry division. We have seen that at Buzancy, this led to these cavalry divisions keeping too close to their corps. The infantry divisions, on the other hand, were sadly in want of cavalry for their own purposes. On the evening after the combat of Nouart the rear guard was composed of infantry only. Had it consisted of an infantry division, with a cavalry regiment permanently attached to it, I do not believe that the 5th Corps would have been taken unawares on the following day. If the cavalry attached to the infantry in each army corps is united to form a division, it can neither perform the functions of a cavalry division nor comply with the wants of the infantry. An infantry division without divisional cavalry has an unhappy *rôle* to play. It is not independent, it is practically blind.

The strength of the cavalry attached to the infantry has differed greatly in the various armies. In 1864 and 1866 each Austrian brigade had one squadron. In the German army the regimental organization plays too essential and important a part in every respect to be divided permanently. Every infantry division therefore has a regiment of cavalry attached to it. The cavalry believe

¹ It has already been done; the German Army Corps now has 120 guns, i.e. 4.8 per thousand infantry. Each Division has 36 guns, the Corps Artillery 48 guns.—ED.

this to be too much, the infantry does not think it is enough. I believe, however, that if we saw the need of more or stronger cavalry divisions, we would not hesitate to diminish the strength of the divisional cavalry and attach only one squadron to each brigade, i.e. two to each infantry division.

CHAPTER II. in "Bronsart" (Part II., p. 245)¹ deals with the strategical nature of mobilisation, particularly as regards the rapidity with which it can be executed. In discussing strategical deployments, I stated that every State must keep its plan of mobilisation secret. We are therefore unable to examine the latter critically or deduce other principles except this one, that we may safely trust to our Supreme Command, to accomplish all that is within the range of possibility in this direction.

This Part deals further with the organization of the various headquarters, of the composition of the army corps and its parts, of independent divisions, of special formations, and of the garrison army. The organization of the various headquarter staffs exerts the utmost influence on strategy. We have seen from the manner in which the Prussian Army of 1806 and the Austrian Army of 1859 were led, how important it is that those persons at each headquarters who influence in any way the strategical measures should agree, and also, that, when various opinions prevail at different times, the troops have to make useless and exhausting marches and counter-marches, thus wasting time. But *time* is the most important factor in strategy. Differences of opinion at the headquarters and the resulting hesitation may deprive a commander of *time* which he may have gained in his strategical deployment.

In 1806 the Prussian Army might have gained a start of some weeks in its strategical deployment.

In 1859 the Austrian Army gained more than a month

¹ The references refer to Lieut.-Col. Hare's translation.—ED.

in its strategical deployment. Yet both armies lost this lead by hesitation. It is of more importance in strategy, as I have previously remarked, that one definite guiding idea should be followed out, than that this idea should be the very best possible. Thus Napoleon III. was able in 1859 to carry out successfully a very hazardous operation round the enemy's right flank. Had the Austrians acted with consistency this movement was bound to end in his destruction. The other data given in this part are of the utmost importance, though hardly of a strategical nature.

CHAPTER III. of "Bronsart" (Part II., p. 278), which treats of office duties in the field, contains the most important elementary strategical precepts. If you read this chapter attentively, you will see how much importance Bronsart attaches to the technical preparation of orders, to the certainty of their transmission, and to the clearness, precision, completeness, and brevity of written orders and dispositions. The higher the authority issuing these orders the more general should be the terms used, so as to leave the subordinate leaders freedom of action within their spheres. Moreover the orders received from superior authority should be incorporated in all orders. He also mentions the difference between dispositions and instructions ("*directiven*"). Among the events of the campaign before us I have dwelt chiefly on the elementary strategical lessons to be deduced. For I consider that the excellence of our general staff officers, gained by years of training, contributed very much to the magnitude of our success and ensured the correct working of the strategical machine. Having recognized that a young general staff officer will have more opportunity to shine by extreme care in these duties, so often tedious and apparently petty, than by his opinion of the operations as a whole, I have treated this branch of strategy most fully.

CHAPTER IV. in "Bronsart" (Part II., p. 300), Marches.

—We have discussed in connection with the events of the campaign the preparation of march dispositions, the length of the marches, the use of the greatest possible number of parallel roads, the proportion of depth to width on the march and the influence of the same on the endurance of the troops, the capacity of railway lines and the combination of transport by railway with marches on foot, the rate of marching, and lastly, security on the march. I have only omitted one item. I have not mentioned the use of steamers and the transport of large bodies of troops by sea. The campaigns which we have examined did offer an opportunity, since the greater part of the French army was moved by sea to Genoa and Spezia in 1859. But I have no authentic sources for the details, and cannot therefore formulate rules with any pretence to accuracy. I must therefore leave you to accept Bronsart's statements, and abstain for my part from confirming them by illustrations from military history.

Notwithstanding the importance of the subject, I have carefully avoided all mention of the order of march, because it belongs solely to the field of applied tactics.

CHAPTER V. of "Bronsart" (Part II., p. 364).—We have also had occasion to discuss the questions of *rest* and *quarters*, in so far as they affect strategy. Continued bivouacking impairs the strength and efficiency of the troops considerably; and we have also considered cantonments, from the most comfortable to be obtained in war, in which divisions diminished to three-quarters of their normal strength were in cantonments almost 9 miles long (from the 23rd to 25th August, 1870), to the very closest, where the entire infantry of the Guard Corps was compelled to seek, and found, shelter in two villages (Romagne, Banthéville). We have found that the commanders of units must endeavour to get their men under a roof every night if possible, and to give them the necessary rest (one day after three or four marches),

and that the latter is frequently rendered impossible by the necessity of operating with rapidity. Calm and temperate strategy will probably decide between these opposing considerations in such a manner as to suffer the least losses and gain the greatest results, the latter being the more important of the two. Thus on the 1st September the Meuse Army felt the urgent want of a day of rest, but for the sake of a great success decided nevertheless to advance and attack at any cost. Troops which are ordered to rest and are then attacked by the enemy, like the 5th French Corps at Beaumont and the whole Army at Sedan, are in the worst position.

The other indispensable details, such as the capacity of villages to hold the troops in close or extended quarters, space for camping, bivouacs, security by means of outposts, etc., have little to do with our subject, strategy, and I have therefore omitted them. As regards the position of the headquarters with reference to the troops, we have deduced the same rules which Bronsart lays down.

CHAPTER VI. of "Bronsart" (Part II., p. 403), Supplies.—In the beginning of this chapter Bronsart expresses the opinion that the supplies of a large army during active operations are on the whole an unsolved problem. I have myself been unable to give you from experience definite rules as to how to protect troops in war from every kind of want; I could only give you a few hints, when we were discussing the campaign of 1859, how to combine the requisitions made by the troops themselves with the efforts of the commissariat. The richer the country in which the war is carried on, the more we may calculate on subsisting on the requisitions made by the troops in their quarters and their vicinity. It should be borne in mind, however, that more waste is connected with this method of supplies than when the commissariat has had time to regulate them with more reasonable economy. The former method exhausts the

country more, and if the same troops, or other troops, have to remain there for some time, it will be found in the interest of the army to spare the country, though hostile. It would then be advisable, time permitting, to place the requisitions and supplies entirely in the hands of the commissariat.

It is plain that the troops will receive their supplies more quickly if they are permitted to take what they find, than when they have to wait for the supply columns. During active operations, as for instance between the 26th August and 1st September, 1870, it will frequently be necessary to live entirely on what can be found. In such cases the supplies will affect the operations, and will necessitate several columns of march so that the supplies from a greater area may be available. We have seen how the Army of Châlons, marching in too dense a formation, was impeded in its movements by the question of supplies, and had to halt a whole day in the vicinity of the magazine at Reims. On the other hand, the Germans frequently lived exclusively on what they could find in the country. War is not invariably conducted with such rapidity as between the 26th August and the 1st September, 1870. There are times of less hurried marches and of halts. In that case rational strategy will insist on regular and ample supplies being furnished by the commissariat.

In any case want of food will confront the troops when decisive actions are imminent. When you consider the masses of troops which are concentrated in modern times for a decisive battle, and when you estimate the transport required for bringing up the supplies, whilst the densely crowded masses can collect supplies only from a few villages, you will understand that it is impossible to bring up the supply columns on the few roads and by-roads available, and to distribute their contents on one day, for on the following day the troops march off at daybreak, or engage in battle. The invention of concentrated meat and

preserved vegetables by diminishing the weight and bulk will considerably facilitate the subsistence of such masses. But the difficulty will not be completely obviated. Fodder cannot be compressed in a similar manner (hay only can be compressed). This is another reason why the strategist should provide ample supplies and transport, whenever there is time and opportunity. I pointed out to you that many of the Austrian troops in 1859 had their efficiency for battle seriously impaired, because their commander had failed to make proper arrangements in this respect. Still, as I have stated, troops will in any case suffer want at the time of great decisions. But they will be better able to withstand the privation if they have been well fed as long as possible before then.

I must ask you to note that the experiences of these campaigns are by no means exhaustive. The theatres of war, Thuringen, the Lomellina, the region near Milan, and lastly France, are perhaps the most fertile countries of the world. The theatre of war may be sparsely populated and its supplies may be easily exhausted. In that case the strategist cannot even reckon on one day's supplies for the army, however many columns may be formed. It may be necessary to carry a large quantity of provisions and supply the troops altogether from the rear, so as to render the preservation of the army probable, if not absolutely certain, for this can never be. Strategy then will not always act with the same rapidity as the Germans found to be possible in 1870, but will suffer many delays on account of the difficulties of supply. But even then matters should not reach such a pitch as to render the Commander-in-Chief absolutely dependent on the Commissary-General, but we cannot then hope for such rapid decisions as we witnessed recently, because the former will be somewhat more dependent on the latter, but to what extent cannot be formally laid down.

The two following chapters in "Bronsart," VII. and

VIII. (Part II., p. 425 and p. 440), on communications, hygiene, supply of ammunition, arms, clothing and reinforcements and reconnaissance, though part of the duties of the General Staff, do not come within the scope of strategy. Some of these points, for instance the supply of ammunition, I have discussed in detail in our former correspondence (Letters on Artillery).

As regards Chapter IX. of "Bronsart" (Part II., p. 514), which treats of the special duties of the officers of the General Staff, I have repeatedly pointed out to you the importance of the information sent in by the reconnoitring cavalry during active operations, when the reliability and timely receipt of news furnished by spies are both doubtful.

I have taken the liberty of giving the above summary of our discussions in connection with Bronsart's systematically arranged "Duties of the General Staff" in order that you may not have to extract, recapitulate and classify from these "Letters" the lessons which I have deduced from events in the subordinate sphere, or rather the technical executive branch of strategy. If you must have a systematic summary, as we had at the end of our correspondence on Artillery, you may, if you find it necessary, compare everything I have deduced with Bronsart's work, and the above review will convince you that I have touched on everything, but not exhausted it by any means, for that is quite impossible. The situations are so changeable that the same case never recurs in the same manner, so that the whole field would not be exhausted even if we examined all the campaigns in the world in a similar manner. For the psychological element—human nature with its infinite versatility—plays the chief part, and there is no end to the study of man.

But on the other hand we have not lost sight of the grand strategy of the Supreme Commands and Army Com-

manders of the opposing forces in this eventful campaign of ten days from the 23rd August to the 1st September. Permit me to give a brief review of the same.

In connection with the French Supreme Command I have sufficiently pointed out how the want of harmony between the home policy and the imperative demands of the strategical situation became the chief cause of the disastrous issue of the campaign. The fear of a revolution in Paris drove the Regency, and indirectly Marshal MacMahon, into an enterprise which was most welcome to the commanders of the German Army. For even if MacMahon had pursued the plan of effecting a junction with Bazaine without hesitation from the beginning, he would still have encountered seven German army corps barring his road at Damvillers. When the strategical situation forced the Marshal to relinquish this hopeless enterprise, the Regency forced him to commence it again. This resulted in marches and counter-marches which impaired the efficiency of his forces, and weakened it by fatigue. But there are also other very instructive circumstances which increased and hastened the disasters of the French Army. A short review of the career of the Army of Châlons will best enable me to point these out.

The Army had barely assembled near Reims on the 22nd August when it was ordered by the War Ministry to begin the march to relieve Metz on the 23rd August, no time being given to collect a full supply of provisions. The precipitation with which the operations were begun was so great that one of the principal rules of strategy was violated. All available forces were not united for the decision, and the march was begun without waiting for Vinoy's Corps, which amounted to a reinforcement of 39 battalions. The Army marched in too dense a formation with a view to being closed up in case of any emergency. The first march, though quite short, was rendered most exhausting by the crowding together of such large numbers, and, when finished, there was already

a want of provisions. On this account the second march (24th August) was made by the greater part of the Army in the direction of the supplies (at Rethel). The Commander-in-Chief and Commissary-General here exchanged parts, and one corps only (7th) and one cavalry division preserved the original direction of Vouziers. On the 25th August the bulk of the Army moved only a short distance from Rethel, because the matter of supplies was still unsettled. The corps on the right flank (7th) established itself at Vouziers. I do not know whether it was intended to form a protecting pivot there for the various movements of the Army during the next few days. In any case this is what happened. The Corps did not leave Vouziers until the 28th August, and was deprived of its cavalry division, which was detached and directed northwards to Le Chesne. This entailed most unpleasant consequences the very next day. In the absence of any cavalry thrown out towards the enemy, the Corps Commander must have been in a very uneasy frame of mind during the 26th August, and when information was received of the appearance of hostile cavalry at Grand Pré, the whole Corps not only passed the following very stormy and inclement night in position under arms, but sent alarming appeals for assistance to the Marshal. The latter had made a very insignificant march eastward on the 26th August with the masses which had been concentrated at Rethel; he now ordered for the 27th a movement to the south, by which he meant to support the imperilled 7th Corps with the whole of his Army. But when he learned from the reports on the morning of the 27th that the latter was no longer in danger and that he himself must soon encounter the enemy, he did not think it advisable to continue his eastward march, but by a short retrograde movement placed the Army in a position to begin and cover the retreat to Mézières. The orders to make this retreat on the 28th August had been issued, the movements had for the most part been begun, when counter-

orders arrived from Paris. The Marshal had to continue the movement to the east, the execution of which he considered impracticable. As the movements as first ordered had already begun, the Army advanced on this day only 7 to 9 miles to the east, and yet was exhausted.

The leading cavalry division towards the east advanced from Beaumont to Sommauthe, and halted within 9 miles of Stenay. I do not possess the full text of the orders issued by the French Commander-in-Chief, but the inactivity of this cavalry division, which on arriving at Beaumont did not send even a detachment to the important crossing at Stenay, leads me to surmise that the units under the direct orders of the Commander-in-Chief were not informed in the dispositions of the intentions of the Supreme Command. It seems rather as though they were put in motion by daily orders like chessmen. They were quite content when they had carried these out. Had they known the intentions of the Commander-in-Chief as well as the situation, steps would have been taken without special orders to reconnoitre to the east and south on the 28th August, the 1st Cavalry Division from Beaumont towards Stenay, the 5th Corps to the south beyond Nouart, the 7th Corps towards Grand Pré and beyond Buzancy and Layonville. This want of initiative in all parts of the Army can only have resulted from too detailed orders, which gave no information as to the situation. Owing to the improper use of his cavalry divisions, and to this want of initiative on the part of his subordinates, the Marshal remained without information about the strength and position of the approaching enemy on the 28th August.

I have pointed out that had MacMahon been better informed about the enemy, he might have made use of the opportunity to gain a partial success against the Guard and XII. Corps on the 29th August, after which he would have convinced himself of the presence of the united German forces coming up from all directions. He would

then have begun his retreat on Mézières on the 28th. As it was, he preferred to retire to the north, away from the enemy, who was approaching in unknown numbers on interior lines, and half of his army was overtaken by the enemy and defeated on the 30th August. The defective information about the enemy, caused by the faulty organization which assigned no cavalry to the infantry units, gave the battle an unfortunate course from the first, as it began with the surprise of the 5th Corps at noon. Otherwise the two corps (5th and 7th) might very well have held their positions at Stonne and Beaumont until the remaining two could be brought up in support. But the bad principle which originated in Paris and drove the Marshal into this unsuccessful operation towards the east, prompted him to deny support to these two corps, and to recall some of the troops which had advanced to help them.

The battle of Beaumont ended in the disorganization of a large part of the troops engaged, and everyone believed shelter would be found at Sedan, because it was a fortress. The Commander-in-Chief ordered the retreat to that place at 9 p.m., and posted the Army to the north of the fortress in a circular position facing in every direction, which bore the germ of destruction within itself because there was no line of retreat or communication with the base. In the course of the 31st August he failed to gain a clear insight into the enemy's strength and position (even after the battle), and during the battle of Sedan the above-mentioned want of initiative facilitated the success of the enemy, because the latter was able to pass unopposed through the defile of St. Albert. But the difference of opinion of the various commanders, which hitherto had been so costly in time and strength, assisted the opponent still more on the field of battle. The alteration in the Supreme Command changed the object of battle according to whether the new chief contemplated a retreat to Mézières or a march towards

Metz. Whole divisions remained in rear of the fighting line, marching aimlessly up and down, and were involved in the general disorder almost without having come into action, at any rate without having brought their full strength to bear on the conflict.

Briefly reviewed, the causes which brought about the destruction of the French Army of Châlons were, therefore:—

1. Want of harmony between politics and strategy, because the former made demands on the latter which lay beyond the range of possibility.
2. The resulting indecision and counter-orders which wasted time and strength.
3. The precipitate commencement of operations without waiting for all available forces, without providing food or the equipment indispensable for an army, and the unpractical arrangements for supplying the wants of the troops.
4. Marching in too dense and crowded a formation which exhausted the troops even during short marches, and which rendered long marches impossible.
5. The improper employment of the independent cavalry divisions which were not thrown out towards the enemy to reconnoitre.
6. A want of proper system and probably also in the style of orders which did not leave the commanders of the units the necessary freedom to act according to circumstances, or which at any rate did not rouse their initiative.
7. An unfortunate tying-down of the cavalry to the other arms.
8. The disastrous magnetic attraction exercised by a fortress on an army when in need of protection. And lastly,
9. The undermined authority of the sovereign.

If we compare with these the strategical action of the

German Supreme Command and that of the Army and Corps Commanders during this campaign, we find that in every one of the points enumerated they did the very opposite, and thereby gained successes which astonished the world.

In contrast to the precipitate beginning of the French operations before all available forces were united, the Germans calmly completed their strategical deployment on the 21st August, waited for the arrival of the Meuse Army, rested their troops on the 22nd August, and began their advance on the 23rd with all available forces.

I have previously stated that our troops were always well supplied with food. They only suffered privations on the days of the great battles, on which they had for the most part no time for eating. A happy combination of requisitions by the troops themselves and issues by the commissariat, solved the difficult problem at least for this campaign. Altogether one-third of the provisions were procured by requisitions, and two-thirds were issued by the commissariat. I have mentioned in many letters, how the Germans invariably endeavoured to march divided and fight united. If at all possible, no deeper column was permitted on one road than one infantry division. A good cavalry organization attached one-third of the cavalry to the infantry (one regiment to each infantry division), and united the remaining two-thirds of the arm in independent cavalry divisions, for the greater part under the direct orders of the Army Commander. This enabled the infantry divisions to provide for their own security, whilst the cavalry divisions, scouting far in front of the army, sent in timely reports from which the Supreme Command could deduce the measures and intentions of the enemy.

I have laid sufficient emphasis on the system and style of orders which informed the subordinate leaders in brief terms about the intentions of the superior authorities and at the same time left them the necessary freedom to

act independently, according to circumstances. You may perhaps think that the German Supreme Command was fortunate in being understood and supported by subordinates of exceptional ability. We have seen, it is true, that much was contributed toward the completeness of the success by the spontaneous decisions of the commander of the Third Army on the evening of the 24th August, on the forenoon of the 26th August, on the evening of the 31st August and early on the 1st September (when it directed the two corps from Vrigne-aux-Bois through St. Albert against the enemy's rear), and those of the commander of the Meuse Army at 5 a.m. on the 26th August, during the night of the 28th August, and by assembling the troops during the night of the 31st August, lastly in the battle of Sedan by the competition of the two commanders to draw on themselves as many troops of the enemy as possible. But would these commanders have been at liberty to act in this independent manner, if every detail of the movements had been laid down by the Supreme Command, and if they had not known that they were acting in accordance with the intentions of their leader? Accustomed from boyhood to take a general survey of affairs and not to trouble themselves much with petty details, the members of reigning houses who devote themselves to the military profession, are as a rule better able than other commanders to familiarize themselves with the ideas of a supreme commander. Moreover they have less inclination to interfere with their subordinates in the details of execution and to tie their hands by detailed orders, than leaders who have grown old and gray in the lower ranks supervising details. But in this campaign the generals commanding the army corps and the commanders of the independent cavalry divisions developed an equally spontaneous activity whenever opportunity offered. It is because I was always present with the Guard Corps witnessing the execution of details, that I am unable to quote spontaneous

strategical decisions by the other corps or commanders. But I am convinced that were I familiar with the detailed orders of the other corps, I could quote an equal number of similar instances on their part. I will only remind you of the promptness with which the General Commanding the I. Bavarian Corps availed himself, under cover of dawn, of the permission to hold the enemy fast by an isolated attack on Bazeilles; and of the manner in which the generals commanding the V. and XI. Corps hastened to reach the enemy from Vrigne-aux-Bois by way of St. Albert. If such spontaneous action is common property of all, it must have been roused and inculcated by the Supreme Command. This was the art of command, practised by the Supreme Command in war, and by the General Staff in peace.

I have also explained on former occasions how strategy and politics were in complete harmony in the German Supreme Command.

"These requirements can be fully met only when the supreme direction of the political and military affairs of the State rests in the same hand" (Blume). Such was the case with the German Supreme Command in the fullest sense of the words. At another place the same author remarks: "After the hostilities have commenced, considerations of the most rapid and complete overthrow possible of the enemy's forces govern the situation." In accordance with this rule German policy placed military action in the foreground as soon as the war broke out, and made no demand on strategy which tied the latter's hands or forced it into disastrous enterprises. It was thus rendered possible to adhere to the plan first adopted and to avoid useless counter-orders and exhausting and aimless marches. But whilst adhering to the original plan the strategy became more and more specific, according to circumstances and the successes gained, and aimed at higher objects.

The original plan is expressed in the order for the

investment of Metz and the formation of the Meuse Army (Army orders of 11 a.m. 19th August) in the few words "that the armies were to continue to advance on Paris in order to oppose the new formations assembling at Châlons, with sufficient forces."

Two days later this advance was regulated in a very general manner thus, "the Third Army will lead by one day's march in order to attack the enemy in front and right flank wherever he may make a stand, and at the same time to drive him away from Paris to the north." (Army orders of 11 a.m. 21st August.)

The first three marches on the 23rd, 24th and 25th August, were made in accordance with these instructions.

On the 25th August the reports received rendered it probable that the enemy was marching eastward from Châlons and endeavouring to effect a junction with Bazaine. In doing so he offered to the German Command the most favourable opportunity to consummate its original plan. The Meuse Army was pushed forward to the north, and the Third Army was directed against the enemy's right flank. The "march table" for the 26th, 27th and 28th August contemplated the concentration of seven army corps in the vicinity of Damvillers to intercept the enemy's advance eastward by a decisive battle, while the remainder of the Third Army was to threaten his flank and rear. The slowness with which the French Army advanced permitted the German Command to seek the decision on the left bank of the Meuse at a greater distance from Metz, and to do without the support of the troops investing Metz. The last march for concentrating at Damvillers was therefore not carried out, and the enemy was sought on the left bank of the Meuse. The marches of the 28th and 29th August were thus made in a northerly direction. The German Command became convinced by the night of the 29th, that the enemy was north of the German Army between the Aisne and the Meuse. The original plan of driving the enemy away from Paris was now expanded to

the plan of throwing him due north by a frontal battle and pin him against the Belgian frontier. The result now aimed at was far more extensive than the one expressed in the army order of the 21st August. This plan succeeded by means of the battle of Beaumont as regards one half of the hostile army, which in its turn drew the other half towards it. The Supreme Command then aimed still higher, as shown by the order of 11 p.m. on the day of Beaumont: The hostile army is to be pursued from the south, enveloped on both flanks from the east and west, forced over the Belgian frontier, and thus, owing to the neutrality of that country, prevented from further active participation in the war. The movements on the 31st August and early on the 1st September were made with this view. The position in which the enemy was encountered on the morning of the 1st September, enabled the Supreme Command and the commanders of the two armies between 7 and 8 a.m. to aim at completely surrounding the enemy.

In contrast to the undermined authority of the French ruler we notice the firm authority of the Supreme Commander of the German Armies, an authority more firmly rooted and unswerving than any in history. It was not, like that of Napoleon I., based on fear. It had its origin in the confidence which all reposed in it. This confidence was shown before the opening of the campaign by the action of those German princes who willingly left their frontiers towards France unprotected, knowing that the concentration of the German forces at the decisive point was best calculated to protect their states. In the ranks of the army this confidence increased from day to day with each success, and reached such a pitch that the expressed wish of the Supreme Commander was looked upon as a decree of fate, like the weather or the seasons, and not subject to any change on the part of man. That confidence and that authority made Germany strong and united. Whilst both exist, Germany need fear no danger

from without, and every German can confidently repeat the words of the inspiriting song: "Lieb, Vaterland, kannst ruhig sein." We need only begin to fear, when those elements in the State which are inimical to the Government succeed in undermining the authority of our Sovereign. May God grant that then we may be able to say with the poet: "When I have begun to fear, I have ceased to fear!"

THE END.



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